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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[THEIR FIRST MEETING.]

AN INJURED WOMAN.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"A Double Engagement," &c., &c.

CHAPTER I.

KELLY'S HANDSOME DAUGHTERS.

One like the rose when June and July meet.
The other, the opening bud sweet May discloses,
Both so unlike, and yet alike in this—
They are two roses.

It is so easy to whisper the evil thing and find ears ready to absorb the whispering, especially if it concerns a girl who is pretty as well as poor. The harder portion of the world cannot think of beauty allied to a scanty purse without hinting at evil in the present or in time to come, and there were many harsh things said of the youngest of Tom Kelly's daughters.

Tom Kelly had no enviable character of his own. He was an idle, good-for-nothing scamp with a handsome face and figure and a certain flashy air about him that led many to believe in his assertion that he was a born gentleman and had only been driven to reside in Maimore Square, Peckham, by stress of pecuniary weather. Gentleman or not he led an idle life and had never been known to soil his hands by any form of labour whatsoever.

But those long, white, well-shaped hands of his were not in another sense particularly clean. He was known in all the billiard rooms in the neighbourhood, and there were whispers

afloat of his being hand in glove with the marksmen, who were always ready to back or lay against his play, and it was curious, to put it mildly, how the luck followed them. He was an adept at many games in which cards are used and was famed for leading the young into night play and floating them for awhile upon the gambler's ocean until they were left high and dry upon the black rocks of ruin and shame; and the rest of his spare time was devoted to the turf and inveigling the unwary to bet with him upon what were certainties in his favour.

But he was not disliked, for he had a genial way that, backed by his good looks, won the hearts of his associates, and none dare insult him or insinuate foul play, for he was an athlete and had any amount of pluck. At forty-two years he was still ready to fight a navvy if need be, and occasionally indulged his friends with an encounter with a son of the soil, in which the latter was speedily worsted.

Peckham had never seen his wife, for she died when his youngest daughter, Rhoda, was seven years of age, and then he was living at some place he, from prudential motives, never spoke of; but it was known he had money with his wife in the nick of time, just as he had run through what was left him by his father, and he would have squandered every penny of it if a considerable portion had not been wisely invested in buying him an annuity of a hundred pounds a year for life.

With that income he took a house at fifty pounds a year and put such furniture into it as he had, and for three years got along as such men do, getting into debt, paying a little off and increasing his obligations until no more credit could be had.

Jane, his eldest child, was then twelve years of age, a little woman in her way, stout, rosy, pretty, and very shrewd. She "kept house" and looked after Rhoda, who was a source of much deep thinking to every susceptible boy in the neighbourhood. She was called the Rose of Peckham, and she was undoubtedly as pretty a bud as ever was seen.

The creditors endeavoured to worry Tom Kelly, but they did not so much as ruffle one of his feathers.

"You may sue me if you like," he said, "and I will get nothing, for I shall levant, evaporate, disappear. I am a free man and can live in the moon if I like. If you let me alone I will deal with you and pay ready money and you may get the rest—some day."

The "some day" had indubitably a very remote air about it. But they let him alone, and he lived on for years, haunting the public-houses, attending the races, gambling, drinking and making merry, and always managing to keep a pound in his pocket.

Jane took early to dressmaking, and having a soul that absorbed fashions, and an instinct for making cheap materials look to the best advantage, she by degrees got a very good connection together, so that the housekeeping was independent of her father, and when Rhoda was old enough she sought to teach her the business.

But Rhoda was pretty and spoiled. Jane had ever bowed down before her and her father spent all the time he could spare for home in humouring her in everything. It was he who was always telling her of her beauty and comparing her to her mother, whom he called

"a woman who ought to have been a duchess at least."

"But poverty kept us down, Rhoda," he would say. "Poverty is an accursed thing. I hope you will never marry a poor man or a snob. Have a gentleman or nothing."

Rhoda adored him. To her he was a shining light in a little dark world of vulgarity and meanness. She had a remembrance of a place they had lived in that was better than Peckham, where the houses were larger, better kept, and the people better dressed, and where all the men did not migrate towards the City at eight o'clock in the morning. A deep and burning hatred of the place she lived in settled upon her young and ambitious heart.

It was all natural enough, and there was nothing unhealthy in her aspirations, provided she did not allow them to lead her out of the right way. Jane watched over her with much anxiety and tended her with the care of a mother until she was sixteen years of age, when Rhoda took the reins of her own life in hand and declared that she could "run alone."

Jane was then nineteen, a handsome girl, with just a shade too much thoughtlessness in her face. Not at all a pride or an old-fashioned young person. She was not one of those abominations who are always telling people the way they should go, and insisting that the only way is right lies through a dull, dim road where the sun of mirth never shines and no flowers of fancy grow. Jane enjoyed life in her way, and liked to see others do the same, only she knew that some of the joys of life had a sting behind them.

Rhoda rebelled against dressmaking, or rather against Peckham dressmaking. Her idea was to get up to the West End among the lords and ladies. She wanted to know the great people, and she was quite sure that before long she would fall in love with a lord and a lord fall in love with her.

"And then how nice it would be," she said. "No more work for you, Jane, and father would have a carriage and blood-horses and go to the Derby with a break and four, and we could have a ball and dinner party every week."

"You waste your time talking like that," said Jane, without looking up from a dress she was turning.

"Not a bit of it," said Tom Kelly, who sat by the fire smoking a cheroot. "People who don't aspire to these things never get them. I'll back Rhoda to get something good some day."

"Father, it is so wrong of you to encourage her."

"All right, Jane. Then I won't do it."

"I don't want encouragement," said Rhoda, impetuously, as she tossed her head so that the golden masses of hair flashed in the sunlight. "Do you think I haven't thought it all over myself? I don't say that I despise dressmaking, and I am willing to work, but I want to have something better to deal with than stuff like this, and I hate re-trimming dresses that are musty with wear."

"It wouldn't be a bad thing if Rhoda had a year's apprenticeship at the West End," Tom Kelly suggested.

It was a spark that fell upon a hidden train, and Rhoda was immediately in a blaze. It would of course be a glorious thing, and what an improvement she would make in the business when she came home for good again.

"For you know, dear," she said to Jane, "that, clever as you are, there are some things you cannot pick up at Peckham or out of a cheap fashion-book, or find in your own head."

"An apprenticeship for a year would cost at least ten pounds," Jane said, "or it might be more."

"Look here," said Tom Kelly, pausing on his way to the door, "I think that idea of mine is a good one, and as I had a little luck last night at whist—young Sweeny in the Post Office lost twenty pounds—I'll give something towards the apprenticeship. Here is a fiver if you can do the rest, Jane."

It was such an unwonted piece of generosity that it took them both fairly by storm, and

Rhoda, throwing her arms around his neck, called him some endearing names, and kissed him on his cheeks, his forehead, and lips, and rubbed his ears, and indulged in many other amiable antics with which both were tolerably familiar, for when together they made it the business of their lives to pet each other.

Jane still held back, but the battle was as good as won, and ere the week was out everything was settled. A fashionable dressmaker in St. George's Street condescended to take the ten pounds on condition of Rhoda becoming her apprentice for the term of twelve months, six days of the week to be spent at her establishment and the Sunday at home.

"We have no certain hours," said Madame Clarie, whose English accent was sufficient to show that her name and her nationality did not agree. "The time we begin and finish all depends upon what we have to do. There are dull times and busy seasons, and it is difficult to say when one ends and the other begins."

This Rhoda soon discovered to be perfectly true. She went away one morning full of hope and picturing the gay and great people she should see and help to fit, and she came back on the Saturday white and furious.

When Jane kissed her she gave a little angry peep in return, pulled her bonnet off, crossed in the corner, and sat down at the tea-table ready laid for her return.

"Don't mind my being angry," she said, "for really, Jane, I can't help it. That place is a regular swindle. What sort of life do you think it is?"

"A very hard one perhaps," said Jane, quietly.

"It is what the men call nigger driving," said Rhoda, with set teeth. "Up as soon as it is light and headed with a score of others in a dingy little room until it is time to go to bed. Just a few minutes for each meal, and a regular Gorgon of old Frenchwoman keeping an eye upon us all day. I shall never be able to endure that life."

"But you are bound, Rhoda, dear."

"Then I will unbind myself."

"But Madame Clarie has the law to help her to insist upon you serving your time."

"Then I will run away—to sea or somewhere," said Rhoda; "or perhaps I shall do something worse. I wonder they don't find a girl hanging up behind the door every morning."

Tom Kelly came in to tea, a meal he did not much affect, but he put in an appearance in honour to Rhoda, and when he heard the account of her first week expressed an emphatic opinion that it was "slavery," an opinion with a deal of the element of truth in it.

"If it goes on," he said, "I shall stop it. But this Madame Clarie, as she calls herself, said something about different seasons. Try another week, Rhoda."

"Very well," Rhoda said, "but if it is as bad as this it shall be the last."

On Saturday Rhoda went away again, her father accompanying her to St. George's Street, and he promised to call for her on the following Saturday if she wished it, but Rhoda begged him not to come if he had anything to do. As Saturday afternoon was generally spent in playing pool with young City clerks, who gave up their half-holiday to billiards, he was not likely to appear.

During that week a change came over the lot of Jane. She got a sweetheart, a young fellow employed by a firm of printers in the City. He had command of a composing-room, and was in receipt of good pay. In a pecuniary sense the match was not a bad one, and he had an average amount of good looks.

He and Jane had seen a deal of each other at various times, as he lived with his parents in the square, and from little of the preliminary skirmishing of lovemaking, looks more or less sheepish on his part and blushing on hers, they got to smiles, then to words, and finally to a proposal and acceptance.

Tom Kelly did not object. He had never entertained much hope of Jane making a mark in the world, he relied on Rhoda if he relied upon anybody to do that.

She had good looks, but her nature was honest, and it was quite right that she should marry a homely man.

He rather patronised the lover, David Moore, and his patronage was resented in secret, but men when they are in love put up with a vast amount of nonsense from those who may have it in their power to put a check upon their happiness, and he did not resent it openly.

"But when I am married," David thought, "this very flash gentleman won't live with me."

Tom Kelly's patronage extended to borrowing an occasional half-crown of his future son-in-law and most generously asking him to have a drink out of it.

David bore that with other inflictions as a thing that must be endured for a time if he were to gain the promised land.

Rhoda was nearly two hours later on her second Saturday, but she was decidedly more contented, and David Moore being in the little room playing cribbage with her father, Jane did not ask any questions. Rhoda looked more cheerful and gave no signs of having any complaint to make.

On hearing of the engagement she offered her congratulations, and in a pretty way amused her father by patronising David, who did not object to it, for although he did not love Rhoda, he admired her as something superb and out of the common lot entirely.

As a woman Jane was much more pleasing to him, but as a picture Rhoda, with her wealth of hair, bright, flashing eyes, perfect nose, rich mouth, and lithe, graceful figure, was unapproachable.

He was very happy that night, and when he had lost five sixpences running and Tom Kelly would stay to play no more, having a more lucrative engagement at a billiard-room, he sat with the two girls by the fire with Jane's hand in his, and talked of his business, his friends, and his prospects until eleven o'clock.

Jane listened with interest to all he said, while Rhoda scarcely heeded him. When she spoke it was in monosyllables. She sat with her eyes fixed dreamily upon the fire, and her thoughts were plainly far away from her simple home.

At eleven Jane proposed supper, and David insisted upon running out to get some baked potatoes. He knew a man who was famed for his flowery murphies, and was sure the girls would enjoy them, and they both did, notwithstanding that Rhoda was induced to turn up her nose at the idea of love's offering taking the form of baked potatoes.

However, it was Jane's lover and not hers, and as she had a good appetite the hot flowery balls well buttered were an agreeable accessory to the fat end of a cold shoulder of mutton.

It was past twelve o'clock when Tom Kelly, a little uncertain as to his footsteps, returned. Jane had gone to bed, and Rhoda was sitting up for him with her hair loose, hanging in masses past her waist.

Her father's vision was rather hazy, but he could not help being struck by her handsome appearance.

"By George, Rhoda!" he exclaimed. "You are a queen."

"Am I so very pretty?" she asked, as she clasped her hands about his arm.

"Pretty is not the word," he said, his admiration overcoming his thickness of speech. "You are handsome—beautiful. There are not half a dozen to match you in all London among either snobs or nob's, by Jove."

Holding her face upon his arm she smiled like a pleased child, but did not say anything in reply.

He fondled her hair and stroking her face called her fifty endearing names—his pet, his pride, his pearl, and so fed her with the plumbum that turns so many young heads and opens the road to ruin.

She went to rest very happy without noticing the condition he was in, and he mixed himself a final glass of grog from a bottle he had brought home with him in his pocket, and lit a cigar and thought a deal as he smoked it.

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"In proper hands," he muttered, as he arose and unsteadily lighted his candle, "that girl might reach any position."

In the morning Rhoda was down as soon as Jane, and was so cheerful that her sister thought it would be unwise to refer to the establishment of Madame Clarie.

Business altogether was eschewed, and at church time David Moore called for Jane.

Rhoda, like her father, did not go.

In the afternoon the lovers went for a walk, and Tom Kelly fidgeted about for awhile, and at last fell asleep. Sunday was a most miserable and unbearable day to him, a day arranged in his opinion for the punishment of innocent amusement seekers. It was a crime to close the public-houses and to shut up billiard-rooms, and he really wondered that people stood it.

As soon as he was well away in the land of dreams Rhoda slipped quietly out of the room, and putting on her bonnet and jacket with great care, hastened down to the Old Kent Road.

The day was dull, and there were not many people about. A few worshipers of Bacchus hovered about their closed shrines with their hands in their pockets and smoking pipes filled with very pungent tobacco which they puffed right and left indifferent to passers by.

Rhoda had sniffed its aroma a thousand times, and it had never been pleasing to her, but now it was positively repulsive, and she crossed the road and faced towards Deptford.

"Why don't they smoke cigars?" she said—"good cigars, and not smoke so often. I like a good cigar—such as—*it* was smoking. How different are all the belongings of a gentleman to what we find here."

And then she saw **HIM** approaching—so tall, handsome and well dressed—and he was smoking a cigar, which he threw away as he approached, an act she recognised as a courtesy and was pleased with; but it gave her some regret, for she had a kindly remembrance of the splendid tobacco he was smoking when first they met.

He stood before her, tall, erect, with strong frame and well-shaped, handsome features, perfectly dressed, and the unmistakeable tone of a well-bred man. A well-shaped hand clasped hers, and a pleasant, well-modulated voice rang in her ears.

"My dearest Rhoda, are you not a little late?"

"I could not get away before," she replied, "and I must return in an hour, for Jane will be back and wonder what has become of me."

"This is a dreary place for a walk," he said. "Suppose we ride. We can have a very pleasant little run in a hansom in the time you have to favour me with your sweet presence."

She hung back a little with an indistinct idea that there was something in his proposal that was not strictly correct, but he gave her no time for reflection. A cab passing at the time he hailed it and handed her in.

"Where to, sir?" the cabman asked.

He paused a moment, and looked about him as if he were uncertain of the locality.

"Isn't Blackheath somewhere near here?" he asked.

"Not very far away, sir."

"Then drive to the Heath and back, and do not distress your horse. I will consider that in the fare."

CHAPTER II.

DOUBT.

Oh, tell me where the maid is found,
With heart to love without deceit,
And I will search the whole world round
To sigh one moment at her feet.

LEFT alone in his house, Mr. Tom Kelly slept long and sound. He was blessed with one of those constitutions that nothing seems to impair, and however his nights were passed his days were undisturbed by the real or fancied ailments of the weak.

Some people will tell you that such men go out like the "snuff of a candle," and very likely they do, but they are often very tardy in their

going out and live through a long career of erratic enjoyment without so much as a croak or a groan. Their follies, and their aimless, worthless lives, we however lay aside as things to reflect upon, but not to be discussed in pages such as these that are written to amuse the weary and while away the lonely hour.

At half past five David Moore and Jane returned, and after a little shaking the sleeping man was aroused. He got up, yawned, thought he would have a little brandy and water before tea, and then asked for Rhoda.

"We left her here with you," Jane said, as she put the table ship shape for tea.

"So you did," Tom Kelly replied, "and I daresay she thought it tiresome to sit here alone and went out for a stroll. Have a drop of brandy and water, David?"

"I would rather not, thank you," the young fellow replied.

"Oh, but you must. It's all nonsense standing out when one offers you a treat. Get two glasses and a little cold water, Jane."

"I think David will be better without it," Jane said.

"Glasses and water, my dear child, if you please. And I say, David, you listen to me. Jane is sure to try it on like the rest of women, who never allow a man to know what is good for himself. But don't you stand it. Be firm at the outset, and it will save a world of haggling afterwards. Come, if you don't drink I shall be offended."

David did not care for brandy and water, and just then he would have given a trifle to be allowed to go without it, but Tom Kelly was firm, and while they were drinking it Rhoda came in, a little flushed and out of breath.

"I had no idea it was so late," she said, as she sank into a chair. "I hoped to be home before you and have the tea ready."

"Been for a stroll, Rhoda?" asked Jane.

"Yes," she replied.

"Did you meet anybody?"

"Anybody we know, you mean?"

"Of course I do, you little goose."

"Nobody. There were not half so many people out to-day as there usually are. Where have you been?"

Jane could not tell exactly where they had been, except that it was in the direction of the Rye, and thus came a little fun and amusement that effectively diverted all attention from Rhoda's prolonged absence, and she was very assiduous in keeping up the subject, rattling on in her liveliest manner.

There were muffins for tea, and she and David toasted them. David was toasted as well as the muffins with a fire of rattling pleasantries that rained from Rhoda's lips. She had never been so affable or charming in his eyes, and he did not wonder at the devotion Jane showed for her in word and deed. He felt it would be a thing to be proud of to have such a sister-in-law.

The young people were happy, and Tom Kelly tolerated the humble meal. After it was over he slipped out to spend an hour at a favourite public-house, where the latest betting could be ascertained and a few congenial spirits met with. Then Jane spoke to Rhoda of her employment.

"You are more reconciled, dear," she said.

"Yea," Rhoda replied. "We leave off on Wednesday now at seven, and that gives us a break."

"How nice! David and I could come up and see you next week perhaps."

"Wednesday is an off day for me," David said.

"But isn't it too far for you to come for an hour's walk with me?" Rhoda asked, "and, besides, you know the old saying about two being company and three something else. I am not at all lonely, as I begin to like some of our girls, so pray don't spoil your evening for me."

"It would not spoil it, Rhoda."

David murmured something to the same effect, but he had a palpable leaning towards having Jane to himself, and Rhoda laughingly taxed him with it. In the end it was decided that the lovers should not spend their evening up west.

Rhoda was playing a part, but she did not think it a deceitful one. She would have liked a little talk about her lover, but she could not bring herself to speak of him there, and he had suggested the advisability of not saying much for the present. She had however the privilege of thinking of him at home, and that evening she fully availed herself of it.

Let us take a brief peep at him and his surroundings.

Vesey Sutherland was an idle man but not yet a man about town. He had four hundred a year from a rich uncle, Sir Aronibald Sutherland, from whom he had great expectations. The title would also be his by inheritance, but the estate was unentailed.

The fact of his uncle having no children, and he being the next of kin, did not insure the property to Vesey, who had constantly before him the bugbear of a quaint old man with a mind that changed as frequently as the wind and made so many wills that those cancelled would have formed a small library of legal verbiage. But he always spoke well of Vesey.

"He shall have Powerscourt," he said, "if he behaves himself." But as he did not define what he meant by behaving he left his nephew very much in the dark as to what course of life to lead. People have such different ideas of what is worthy and manly conduct.

Furthermore the old man took delight in having his assumed heir spied upon, and for that purpose was in constant communication with a private inquiry office, so that one or more of its miserable agents were always at Vesey's heels. He was aware of this and had learned to know some of them by sight, but he did not fear them if they spoke the truth. His life was not blameless, but it was not unworthy as the lives of men go.

The harassing nature of his position told upon him and by degrees he became unsettled. He found it impossible to adopt any pursuit for amusement or profit, and at times was disposed to end it by thrashing one of the spies and writing to his uncle a letter that would have acted upon that irritable old gentleman like the explosion of a bomb shell; but a fine house and ten thousand a year are things worth waiting for, and he waited.

Wandering one Wednesday evening listlessly smoking down St. George's Street he passed the house of Madame Clarie just as Rhoda with some half-dozen of her fellow toilers came out. It was an unexpected grant of liberty and they were all in high spirits, laughing and chattering together.

There is no prettier sight in the world than half a dozen pretty girls talking together under the influence of a little harmless glee, and Vesey, with a reverence for the sex generally, was not the man to pass with indifference the charming vision the girls presented.

Drawing into the shade of a doorway he let them go on and then followed, his eye singling out Rhoda from the rest as a diamond might be selected from rubies. At the corner of Hanover Square a separation took place, some went one way, some another, and Rhoda dropping behind was left alone.

Vesey Sutherland was not a heartless man, but he had no more thought than usually falls to men of four-and-twenty who have a lot of time to kill and like to do it pleasantly. He spoke to Rhoda on impulse, and he had nothing more in his mind than spending a few minutes or perhaps an hour in what could not fail to be very agreeable company.

The answer she gave him was an angry word. He had asked if she would forgive him if he intruded upon her for a few moments and she said "No." Then he apologised, raised his hat and walked on a step, to turn again.

"I know," he said, "the nature of the gross impertinence I have been guilty of, and I do hope you will forgive me. I was irresistibly attracted towards you or I should not have spoken. I am not one of them who make it the business of their lives to insult unprotected beauty."

Rhoda softened, and he saw it. Do not forget her life, her training, and her visionary

hopes of marrying a GENTLEMAN. She had no doubt that one was before her. There was the true ring in him as there is in a sovereign, and could not be mistaken.

"I am sorry you spoke to me," she answered. "I have been at work all day and I have come out for a little fresh air."

"Why did you leave your companions?" he asked.

"They are going to meet some friends who are strange to me," Rhoda replied.

And so they glided into talking together, and it led to their wandering twice round the square, and then across Oxford Street to Cavendish Square and back again. Vesey was as courteous in his manner as he would have been with the highest in the land—he could not have been otherwise—and the charm of his manner was upon her.

How different it was to anything she had ever heard before. Her father, hitherto, had been the most refined man she knew, but his flimsy gentility paled before the courteous air of this stranger. What possible harm could there be in enjoying his society? It was such a relief not to have to walk about alone.

It ended in his learning who she was and the appointment for the meeting on Sunday being made. Vesey Sutherland had no definite motive in making it, no course was shaped, no design laid out. He had simply found Rhoda very naive and delightful, and he desired to see her again.

As he walked back towards his rooms in Clarges Street he reflected upon the meeting and all that followed. His conscience twitted him with having played a selfish, thoughtless part. But he did not want to have conscience, with its monitories, at his elbow. It was so much pleasanter to think of Rhoda's pretty face and the delightful prospect of seeing it again in a few days.

So he thought of Rhoda, and, instead of going home, walked about till past midnight, smoking cigars, with the pleasant vision in his mind's eye. Then he found himself at the top of the Haymarket, in the midst of its unseemly, riotous bustle, and turned into some supper-room, where he had a few oysters for a light supper.

He had no eyes or ears for anything around him, and successively evading the many doubtful allurements of the neighbourhood by his indifference, returned at last to Clarges Street, followed by a man, who all that night had never left him. After the door closed upon him, that man, aided by the light of a street lamp, made a few notes in a book and walked off towards Pimlico.

Wednesday night came round again, and Vesey Sutherland was early near Madame Clarie's, wisely choosing the friendly shelter of the church porch on the opposite side of the way. The appointed hour was seven, but he was there a little after six o'clock, in a feverish, restless condition. Something had occurred to disturb his accustomed quiet demeanour.

Rhoda was a little later than she expected, but he kept to his post, pacing up and down like a restless tiger in a cage. At last the door opened, and the other girls came out, laughing and chattering on their way. A minute later and Rhoda appeared.

"I thought I would wait until they were gone," she said, as their hands met, "as we might be noticed, and the girls do chatter so dreadfully."

"It is as well, dearest," he answered, "and now what shall we do? Would you like to go to a theatre?"

"I must be in by eleven," Rhoda, hesitating, replied.

"We can manage that," he replied. "There is a piece at the Strand that is over by ten. After that we can have a little supper, and then back to this den again."

"You speak truly," said Rhoda, as they sauntered on, "it is a den, Mr. Sutherland."

"You must call me Vesey, or I shall run away from you. It seems to me as if we were very old friends."

"Only a week ago we met first," said Rhoda, in a low tone, "and yet it seems as if I had known you for years."

"I will accept that as a happy omen, dearest," he said, as he shook off his restlessness and resumed his ordinary manner. "We must ride to the theatre, or we shall see nothing of the play."

Again a hansom was called into requisition, and Rhoda was delighted, as most inexperienced people are, with the mode of travelling—those accustomed to it find it enjoyable. The theatre too was a pleasing change to her, for she had seldom been in one, and never before on the northern side of the water. The habits of Tom Kelly did not lead up to dramatical amusement.

They sat in the back part of the dress circle, in the shade, and were almost alone. Between the acts, and sometimes during the play, when the interest flagged, Vesey and Rhoda talked in an undertone, and all he said was sweet music and the breathings of a new tongue to her.

Both were carried away by the thoughts and hopes and desires in them, and all the outer world was far, faraway.

They supped at a quiet place in the Strand, and Rhoda tasted the delicious little native bivalves, with Chablis for a drink, and her young blood was warmed to a fever heat. Vesey had been dear to her the first hour they met, but now he was a hero, a god in her eyes.

Turning out into the cool air partially cooled her and dispelled the warmth of her fanciful mind, but she was very happy still. It was early yet, scarce twenty minutes past ten, and he proposed that they should stroll back to St. George's Street, leisurely, by the quiet ways. He led her up by Southampton Street to Covent Garden.

It was very quiet there. The business of the day was over, and the preparatory work of the night had not yet begun, and the south side of the dingy little market is very dark and little used at night. No one was near, and he drew her closer to him and kissed her.

It was the first time that the passionate pressure of his lips awoke a tumult of fear within her, and she drew a little back, but he held her tight.

"Rhoda, my darling, is it not a pity that there is no lone isle to which we could fly, and find, as the grand old gardener and his wife did in the first days of Eden, fruit ready to the touch—the sparkling rill to drink at and naught to do but to live and love?"

"I do not understand you," she said, shrinking a little more.

"Let me be plainer," he said; "it is hard to come down to commonplaces at such a time as this, but, my darling, it is due to you to tell you that I cannot, dare not marry."

"Why have you spoken to me then? What do you mean?" she hoarsely whispered. "Why do you tell me this now? Let me go. You have trifled with me."

"No, no," he whispered, hurriedly, "not that. I have loved you—indeed I have."

"Loved me!" she exclaimed, bitterly. "You have amused yourself for an hour with a poor, weak, foolish girl." Then a change came over her, and, clasping her two hands upon her heart, she sobbed: "Oh, Vesey, Vesey, it was cruel of you to lead me so far, for you must have known that I would love you."

(To be Continued.)

SCIENCE.

A NEW ELECTRIC LAMP.—MM. Bouteilleux and Laing, of Paris, have introduced a new electric lamp, described in a recent number of "L'Electricité." This lamp somewhat resembles that of Werdermann. The diameter of the upper carbon is four or five times that of the lower, and is made annular, the central space being filled with a refractory insulator. The distance between the upper and lower carbons is maintained uniform by means of a magnetic

regulator placed in an annular chamber around the holder of the lower carbon. The insulating core of the upper carbon appears to play an important part in maintaining the steadiness of the arc, which has a regular movement around its periphery always in the same direction from left to right, the surface of the upper carbon being evenly consumed, and it burns at a rate four or five times slower than that of the lower one. Lamps of this kind have, it is stated, developed a light of about 125 Carcel burners with perfect steadiness and regularity, the diameter of the small carbon being .16 inch and that of the larger .79 inch, with an insulating core .16 inch in diameter. The consumption of the smaller carbon is from 1.42 inch to 1.81 inch per hour, or about 20 inches in twelve hours, and that of the larger is less than 4 inches in the same time, the cost being under a halfpenny per hour. The lamps are worked by a Meritens machine, and can be sold for about 16s. each.

AN ICE CAVE IN MONTANA.—Two explorers named Lambert and Caruthers discovered, last summer, a large cave on the Dry Fork of Arrow Creek, in the Belt Mountains, in which was half an acre of solid ice of unknown depth. At the time of the discovery, about August 1, the ice was covered with ten inches of water, which prevented a thorough exploration of the cave. The Fort Benton Press says that the ice gives every indication of being in great body, and it is believed, from its appearance, and the fact that in the hottest season only a few inches of it were melted, that it is perpetual. The cave is described as being a great resort for game, as all kinds were killed close to its entrance.

TEMPORARY MAGNETISM.—From recent magnetic researches Herr Auerbach finds the temporary magnetism of cylindrical bodies, *ceteris paribus*, proportional to the mass; greater the greater the length; the less the thickness the greater the density; dependent only on form, not on size; in the case of nickel, according to density and force, a quarter to half as much as in iron. It increases with magnetising force, first proportionally, then (except with very small density) more quickly, and at last more slowly. The quick increase is greater the denser the body. The turning point is, for the same density, at the same place, but with stronger forces the greater the density; for magnetic saturation of powders extremely strong forces are necessary.

SCIENCE AMONG ANTS.—Ants' battles sometimes last many days, in one case seven weeks, the visitors finally taking the stores and removing them to their own houses. Their wars are quite as justifiable as those of men, when the object—pillage—is the same. They have the power, too, of knowing members of their own communities even after six months' absence. Strangers are always driven off or killed. They are very helpful to each other, and show sympathy in case of accident or sickness. Some families of ants build arched roads covered by an arch of clay or mortar for protection against enemies, and show great skill in the work, which is under the supervision of trained engineers, who order a rebuilding if the work is not perfect. Some kinds of ants keep cows, build cow-yards, and milk their cows regularly, and don't throw milking stools at them either to make them "give down," but pat and stroke their backs tenderly. Of course these cows are the plant aphides so familiar to all farmers and gardeners. As an illustration of their ingenuity and intelligence, it was stated that they sometimes excavate tunnels under rivers of considerable depth and width, and use the tunnel for transporting supplies. They dig wells 20 feet deep and a foot in diameter for drinking water. The harvesting ants plant seeds on farms, which they cultivate with great skill and neatness, keeping every weed down and harvesting the grain, curing and storing it safely in weather-proof cavities in the soil. They also organise into divisions with commanders, each individual doing a certain kind of work. Some ants are smart enough for engineers, while others only know enough to do as they are told. They can count and make correct estimates of the magnitude of an undertaking, as proved by observers.

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[AN OBJECT OF COMPASSION.]

A BURIED SIN; OR, HAUNTED LIVES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Kate Branksome's Foe," &c., &c.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RESPECTABLE HOUSE.

I have set my life upon a cast,
And I will stand the hazard of the die.

WITHIN three minutes' drive or five minutes' walk of the most fashionable square in London there stands a quiet house in a quiet street, a house whose appearance is in nowise remarkable, save for its extreme respectability.

In an unobtrusive but pleasant manner it insists upon your recognition of this attribute. The immense brass knocker hammers the fact into you; the massive stone steps which lead to the knocker inspire you with worshipful admiration. "Eminently respectable" seems to be written in large characters on the breadth of front, that "he who runs may read."

It is a sleepy-looking house, with its blinking windows, the green venetian blinds of which are always drawn partly down, like half-shut eyelids. It is a house of retiring disposition, for it stands well back from the quiet street, and interposes a row of brass-tipped, arrow-headed railings between itself and an inquisitive public. It seems to dwell beneath the protecting arm of the law and in the odour of sanctity, for on its left are rarely-used police-courts, and on its right is a little, mouldy, forgotten church, where an indifferent clergyman preaches one indifferent sermon every Sunday to about a dozen indifferent hearers.

The sleepy house dozes all day, giving hardly

a sign of life. At 10 p.m. it shows faint symptoms of returning animation, from 11 p.m. to 3 in the morning its gates are thrown open, its windows are ablaze with light, the rattle and roar of carriages that come and go make the quiet street very noisy indeed. But still the air of respectability is preserved. They are not vulgar hansom or plebeian cabs that break the stillness, but snug equipages and well-appointed broughams; and though the dwellers to right and left turn on their beds and grumble a little to themselves about broken rest, they do not complain. The respectable house is spoken of to their friends with mysterious complacency, with solemn nods and profound head-shakings. It is supposed to be used for grave political conferences; it is believed to be the property of the Opposition leader, the ex-chancellor of the exchequer, and a disaffected secretary for Ireland have been seen walking up the massive steps together, arm in arm, talking state secrets.

It is just midnight—a stormy June midnight—in which the sky is a bejewelled dome of darkest blue in the distant country, and the silence of sleeping nature would be unbroken but for the nightingales who pipe their love-calls to each other from amidst dark shadows of leafy boughs.

St. John Darrell, walking down the quiet street, looking through the eternal smoke-cloud to serene planets and twinkling suns, listening to a policeman's footfall, is conscious of a longing to escape from the long, unbroken ranks of houses, from the foul air, from the everlasting din of the great city. He resolves that on the morrow he will leave town for Freston Castle. Meanwhile, he has business to transact.

He turns in at the arrow-headed gates, which stand invitingly open, runs up the big steps like one who is accustomed to them, and executes upon the brass knocker a bar or two of difficult and peculiar staccato music.

It acts magically as the Eastern "open sesame." The door flies back, apparently by no human agency. Closing it carefully behind him, he steps into Egyptian darkness.

It is peculiar, to say the least, that although every window of the house is brilliantly illuminated, the entrance-hall, into which guest after guest has passed, is black as Erebus. But the visitor is by no means disconcerted.

With fearless footsteps he takes half a dozen paces to the right and runs his hand lightly along the wall until it reaches the third door. Here he repeats with his knuckles the staccato passage, and the same result follows, with this difference: that he walks into a small lighted apartment, the principal articles of furniture in which are a luxurious easy chair and a clock.

In the chair sits a man, dressed in sad-coloured livery, a man with the muscular development of a gladiator, the eye of a hawk, and the respectful repose of feature peculiar to a well-trained upper servant. He rises to his feet as St. John enters.

"Member of the club, sir?"

Had an automaton pronounced the words they could not be uttered in a more commonplace tone, but the hawk eyes take in every detail of the visitor's costume, and scrutinise every feature of his countenance.

"A former member. I come by appointment to meet Mr. Brabazon."

"He has not yet arrived, sir. Will you be pleased to wait?"

And the man in livery indicates, with a slight gesture, the seat he has quitted.

"I will await him in the billiard-room."

And St. John takes two steps towards some curtains opposite.

With the same composed and respectful gravity of feature, with a quick, gliding movement, so easy that it has no appearance of undue haste, the man in livery intercepts him, stationing his powerful frame immediately before the curtains.

"With your permission, sir, I will summon Mr. De Lancey."

He does not pause for permission, if the pressure of his great fist upon a knob concealed by the scarlet folds be the summons of which he speaks.

Apparently it is, for in a few seconds the curtains are parted in the middle, and a gentleman emerges.

A well-preserved gentleman, whose dazzling teeth are miracles of whiteness, whose curly brown locks are so carefully arranged they might almost be a wig, whose youthful figure and faultless coat are triumphs of his tailor's skill, whose delicate complexion and rosy bloom a London belle might envy.

He comes forward with outstretched hands and beaming face.

"Ah! Dawwell, dear boy, awfully glad to see you again. Positively charmed, I am sure, bay Jove. Why do you not come through?"

St. John is looking away carelessly, as though unobservant of the proffered hand. A steely glitter comes into the well-preserved gentleman's eyes as he thrusts it into his pocket; a look somewhat at variance with the continued display of ivory.

"I would have done so, but your new Cerberus seems naturally suspicious of a stranger."

"Cerberus? Haw? Haw? Vewy good. Classic allusion—eh? Cerberus—a watch-dawg of—"

"Preciely!" says St. John, sternly. "Of a modern 'hell,' if you like, Mr. De Lancey. I want Brabazon; where is he?"

"Weally, Dawwell, I am not Bwabazon's keeper. Wish I were, bay Jove. Pretty pickings to be made in that post, I reckon; eh? a Darby Day every week. Some fellow fleeced him outrageously last wace I am told," and the speaker's eyes glitter again, maliciously.

"I won five thousand of him," says St. John, with a haughty emphasis. "The expression 'fleeced' is hardly a happy one, Mr. De Lancey."

"Pooh—pooh—what's in a name, dear boy? 'Where the cawcase is there will the eagles be gathered together.' Isn't that Scripture, or Kowan, or Talmud, eh? Bwabazon's cawcase has been pweyed on pretty considerably, but there is plenty left still for the eagles."

"He arranged to meet me here to-night at twelve."

"Come through to the billiard-woom," says the well-preserved gentleman, disappearing amongst the curtains, and St. John follows.

Passing through a room the same size as the one they have quitted, they find themselves in a large apartment, fitted up with a dozen magnificent billiard-tables. Men in shirt-sleeves walk round them, eagerly intent upon the game. Other men, in all varieties of costume, from riding-boots and leggings to careful evening dress, sit upon a soft, morocco-covered bench that would encircle the room were it not broken for a few yards by a long refreshment buffet, on which stand piles of plates, rows of bottles, baskets of knives and forks, and eatables of every description.

A peculiarity that might attract a tyro's attention is the entire absence of servants. Everyone seems to help himself as a matter of course to all he requires. One man cools his parched lips with a bunch of grapes, another tosses down a bumper of champagne, another is making a substantial meal of cold fowl and ham; but the number of people at the buffet is in ludicrous disproportion to that of excited players and equally excited spectators.

There is curiously little conversation. An occasional suppressed oath, ejaculated under the breath, is heard by everyone within a dozen yards, and excites momentary scornful interest. It comes, probably, from somebody who has lost the lowest stake for which a game is played—ten pounds, that is. When hundreds hang upon a delicate stroke of the cue it is made, and the result is noted for the most part in perfect silence.

St. John Darrell bestows and receives a few careless nods of recognition, and stops at length by a table round which are walking, cues in hand, a young fellow with receding chin and weak patrician face, and a well-yet-up old man who bears a striking resemblance in general appearance to Mr. De Lancey. The game stands 25—20, and it is the old man's turn to play.

"Darrell," whispers the young fellow, eagerly, "if the major miss his stroke the game is mine, for the balls are sure to leave well."

"How much?" asks St. John, laconically.

"A level hundred."

"He will not miss," prophesies St. John, as the major draws back his hand for a difficult following stroke.

"Cannon-pocket off the red—pocket again! Cannon—game," says a friend of the players, who is marking.

"Thanks. I will not play again to-night, major," and the loser counts a little packet of notes and hands them to his opponent. The major thrusts them carelessly into his waistcoat pocket uncounted, and walks to the peg where his coat hangs. Taking it down, with his back turned to the party he has left, he examines his gains with greedy, gloating eyes, under the impression that he is doing so unobserved.

"How much has he won of you this evening in all?"

"Two hundred and fifty. It is very odd. I headed him entirely through the last game, until I missed an easy stroke within five of the hundred, and he won by a break of ten. I have a great mind to challenge him to another," and the speaker takes a step forwards.

St. John's restraining hand is laid on his shoulder.

"Not so fast, mon cher. The major could give forty in a hundred and beat you easily. He still plays to his opponent. Have you paid two hundred and fifty pounds for the lesson and not learned it yet?"

"Ah, Darrell, how do you do? I am a quarter of an hour late, I fear."

"No one but a ghost is supposed to appear with the stroke of the clock. Besides you had a burden to carry, Brabazon."

"Not a very heavy one," and Mr. Brabazon produces a neat pocketbook. "Two five hundred, and four thousands, all crisp and clean. Five thou' in all—not a bad pull for you, Darrell."

"But rather too much for any other man to lose so complacently," replies St. John, pointing the compliment with a courteous bow.

"Pray do not give me more credit than I deserve. I dropped only eleven hundred over the Derby, for I had hedged to the tune of four thou'."

"Can we awwange a game in the next woom, gentlemen? A wubber at whist for instance," asks Mr. De Lancey's bland voice. He has crept up during the interview, and has read over St. John's shoulder the amounts of the notes with glittering, covetous eyes.

"As you will," says Mr. Brabazon, yawning. "What do you say, Darrell?"

"What I said when I resigned membership, that I would never again take a hand at cards or handle a cue at billiards under this roof."

"Wather inconsistent and unusual," sneers Mr. De Lancey, "to make use of the woot to weceive debts of honour under, and afterwards to take a high moral stand against disgorging any of the money, or giving the loser his wenger."

Unseen, St. John's white-ringed hand clenches at the taunt; but his manner as he turns to the speaker is a model of unruffled and elaborate politeness.

"May I ask, Mr. De Lancey, whether you feel personally aggrieved that I refuse to join you at cards?"

The quiet words are so distinct and incisive a few men standing near drift towards the little group, and one nudges his neighbour gleefully. He has heard Darrell's ordinary languid drawl exchanged for those calm, clear tones before, and opines that De Lancey is in for it.

"Aw—I feel aggrieved, both personally and as a member of the club."

"Then I am willing to satisfy you by staking any sum up to five thousand pounds upon a game of chance with you, provided I may choose that game."

Mr. De Lancey rapidly runs over in his mind the resources of the establishment. He knows that there are conveniences for almost every kind of gambling practised in civilised society,

but he knows also that at all these games he is St. John's master, save at whist and billiards.

"Name the game."

"Before I do so," says St. John, emphatically, "I would refresh your memory with regard to an old rule of the club. 'No member shall at any time stake more upon a game than he may have upon him in notes or specie.'"

A smile appears upon the faces of the listeners. Mr. De Lancey has not only frequently violated this rule, but he had at times been known to ask the grace of a few weeks or even months before he could pay his debts of honour.

"Are you twyng to irritate or to insult me, sain?" he asks, furiously.

"Neither, but merely to suggest you may not have five thousand pounds even in your immediate possession."

At this caustic statement the smile of the bystanders becomes a laugh. There is not a man but holds a similar opinion. The well-preserved one is not a favorite, and the opportunity to "chaff" him is the good to be lost.

"Turn out your pockets, De Lancey."

"Pecch out the cash-box, old man."

"Where are your government securities?" drawls an exquisito.

At the last sally there is a perfect roar. It is known that once, for a debt of two thousand pounds, Mr. De Lancey deposited foreign bonds for a similar amount. They were repudiated obligations of some little South American state, the market value being about one hundred and ten pounds.

The victim looks angrily around at the circle of mocking faces, and thinks he has it in his power to cause a "sensation."

"If you will permit me to wether for a moment to the stwong-woom," he responds, loftily, "I may be able to content you, gentlemen."

The "stwong-woom" is a small bricked recess, closed by a heavy iron door. It contains only a patent safe, of which Mr. De Lancey has been custodian for about two years. The safe is occasionally used to receive any unusual winnings, when the lucky owner may deem it imprudent to carry them through London streets during the small hours of the morning.

Since Mr. De Lancey's installation in the "respectable house" his province has been to occupy handsomely furnished apartments in it, to be on duty every night from eleven to three, to interview any non-member who may present himself unaccompanied, to guard zealously against any accident that may betray the real character of the institution—the most fashionable private "hell" in London—and to spend part of the handsome sum voted by the committee for wines and viands, pocketing the surplus.

In the two years he has netted just five thousand pounds. A few hundreds of this amount would be the surplus spoken of, the remainder represents winnings.

Hardly a night but he retires to rest richer by a few sovereigns or a few notes, wrested from an inferior player in those games of mingled skill and chance in which he is an adept.

He opens the safe, takes out a tiny cash-box, unlocks it, and produces a small bundle of notes. For a moment he stands irresolute, debating the expediency of publishing his comparative wealth to men acquainted with the shifts and straits of former days.

The irresolution is but momentary. The gibes of the mockers ring still in his ears; a vision of those clean, crisp notes he saw St. John count sets his pulse beating with covetous excitement.

If he could only add them to this roll. Ten thousand pounds in all. A fortune. Upon the interest or ten thousand pounds, carefully invested, he could live creditably and honourably in some peaceful English villa, or German schloss, or Italian palazzo.

He could escape from the society of men who follow the straits, the follies, the villainies of his career; who do but tolerate him at best; who snub him when he attempts familiarity, and reject his outstretched hand of friendship, as this accursed St. John Darrell did just now.

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He could quit a life of false excitement and hollow gaiety, he could create for himself a home and good reputation; he could patch up his enfeebled frame, do works of charity, make his peace with Heaven; perhaps, if he had but ten thousand pounds.

So he reasons, and all the time there is an instinct strong within him urging him to take his worldly all and stake it against that little roll of paper in St. John's pocket-book.

It is the instinct of a gambler, and all his life he has obeyed it. Long years ago, when he possessed a fair name and a good estate, it stripped and left him bare.

He was mercilessly plucked, and when the poor "pigeon" had lost all his feathers he assumed a new plumage and became a "rook." The instinct is as strong as ever, but he follows it warily, and the fruits of his wariness are five thousand pounds. If he could but make them ten!

Hesitation is over. With swift steps he passes into the billiard-room. St. John is nowhere to be seen. His prey has escaped.

A lounging looks up as he passes.

"De Lancey, they are waiting for you in the 'Kursaal'."

The "Kursaal" is a large chamber set apart for tables similar to those which made Baden-Baden famous years ago. Here he finds St. John, the centre of an interested group, who evidently anticipate fun of some kind, although they are doubtful as to its nature.

Mr. De Lancey thrusts his packet into St. John's hands.

"Do me—aw—the favour—aw—to count them," he says, loftily.

St. John turns over the crumpled sheets.

"There are ten notes of five hundred pounds each."

"Precisely. They settle the question of playing against money in your opponent's immediate possession. I take it. What is the game to be?"

"A very simple one. You shall select any particular card upon which to stake, and I will name another of the same suit. Brabazon shall shuffle, we will each cut, and he shall turn up the pack one by one. If your card appears first you win the stakes, or vice versa."

"It is not a game at all," exclaims Mr. De Lancey, aghast. "It is simply a question of luck."

"A fact of which I am perfectly aware. I would rather not pit my skill against yours, Mr. De Lancey. We do not enjoy equal reputation."

A quiet laugh runs round the circle, the *intendo* is well understood. Its object turns white with rage under his rouge.

Like most gamblers he is slightly superstitious—all the evening he has been playing, contrary to his wont, games in which luck wins rather than skill, and his good fortune has been extraordinary.

"I will play," he says, "although I do not admire your game. What are the first stakes to be?"

"Five thousand pounds, if you will," rejoins his opponent, carelessly.

CHAPTER X.

A FORTUNE CHANGES HANDS.

Look—look again!

I'll not believe it. Beggar'd didn't thou say?

Thou liest, knave.

"Five thousand pounds!"

There is something in the magnitude of the sum contrasted with so trivial a proceeding as turning up a queen before a king, or an ace before a knave, that sends a thrill of wonder through the little company of interested listeners.

Five thousand pounds!

One man is a great broker, to whom it is no new thing to risk such an amount upon the strength of a probable rise in Egyptian, or upon unreliable private information as to the failure of a tea crop. He will note the augmented balance in his banking book, or write a cheque for the

deficit at the next settling-day with equal composure. But to stake the money on the production of one card before another! He is not quite such a madman.

Another is a merchant prince to whom such a venture is common enough as a commercial speculation.

Another is a renowned billiard-player, whose stroke in competing with a professional will be not less steady although upon that stroke his dearest friend may have hung a similar total.

And the very stakes offered have just been paid over by Brabazon as the result of a mistaken bet.

But all these things are common, everyday occurrences. Into all of them enters a certain element of foresight. The votary of simple chance, who would hazard all on the cast of a die, is in their eyes a species of fanatic.

Yet is there method in St. John's madness.

Talking once to Lord Mabrecktham he ironically lauded his own soundness as a financial adviser upon the strength of having spent two fortunes and nearly run through a third.

It is true. The roof of the "respectable house" does not cover at this instant a more reckless spendthrift than St. John Darrell has been.

In the utter confusion of his affairs the sum he has just now won is almost powerless for good.

It will find its way to his lawyers, it will vanish in the labyrinth of a bill of costs, and he will see it no more.

As well lose it here, or make it the instrument of sweet vengeance upon De Lancey.

There is an old wrong which has never been righted, an old score which has never been wiped out.

In the days when he was a headstrong lad with unlimited funds at command, the rook courted his acquaintance, eager to commence the process in which he was by this time an adept.

It was pleasant as well as profitable. He found in his victim a lad of sweet and generous disposition, reckless to a fault, eager to glide down the stream of fashionable dissipation, willing to surrender the helm to an experienced hand, and too honourable himself to question the pilot's character.

So he ran the *barque* which bore Darrell and his fortunes amongst shoals and quicksands, and wrecked it irretrievably.

And ever since he has deemed himself grievously illused that his quondam pupil nourishes still a kind of careless, passive hostility, expressed in witty thrusts and well-bred insolence.

For St. John Darrell, refined and courteous gentleman though he be, is a pagan at heart. That grand Christian doctrine, "Love your enemies," is to him a dead letter.

For his few friends unbounded love, unstinted, watchful service. For the world in general indolent tolerance. For his many enemies cynical contempt. For the few foes who have deeply injured him implacable resentment and vengeance sure though deferred. A pagan creed in truth, but one he likes right well, and observes right faithfully.

"Five thousand pounds if you will,"

"Five thousands devils!" exclaims De Lancey. "A preposterous stake."

"The devils! I agree with you. The winner might be obliged to seek them in an unpleasantly warm climate."

"For how little will you play?" demands his opponent.

"Not for a smaller sum than five shillings," replies St. John, with suave politeness.

A hasty oath rises to Mr. De Lancey's lips.

"Will you stake five hundred pounds?"

"With pleasure. What is your card?"

"The ten of clubs."

"I will take the knave. Brabazon, will you kindly shuffle the pack?"

In curious intense silence the cards are shuffled, the players cut, and Brabazon proceeds to deal. The lookers-on are accustomed to high play here, but the novelty of this proceeding attracts them. It is a kind of gambling duel.

It is a striking scene. The little group of men with watchful, excited faces. The contrast between the expressions of the duelists; the covetous glare of the one, the haughty, impulsive calm of the other, as the cards are swiftly thrown singly with upturned faces upon the table.

"The ten has it," pronounces Brabazon.

A sigh and a murmur run round, De Lancey's countenance is a picture of sordid exultation.

The holder pushes the stakes across to him. St. John puts down another note for five hundred pounds.

"I presume," says De Lancey, "either is at liberty to withdraw from the game the moment he may think proper."

"Certainly."

"Five hundred on the four of diamonds then."

"I stake on the eight."

A period of suspense and another sympathetic thrill as the four is dealt. De Lancey has won again.

One thousand out of the five is his. He makes a futile effort to compose his features. Darrell's have not changed a muscle.

"I must trouble you to give me two five hundreds for a thousand."

"The same stake?"

"Yes."

"I choose the two of spades," says De Lancey.

"And I the five."

As the cards fall more men come softly up. There is a circle two-deep round the players.

"The two of spades; the two wins," cries Brabazon, in a tone of disgust. His sympathies are with St. John, notwithstanding the money upon which that gentleman played was originally his own.

"I will stake five hundred again on the next throw," remarks Darrell, quietly.

De Lancey revives the chances. St. John has now lost three times in succession, and of course that sort of thing cannot go on ad infinitum. Still he has seen red turn up nine consecutive times at *rouge et noir*, and he has faith in his own luck to-night.

"I have no objection. I take the ace of diamonds."

"And I the king."

Breathlessly De Lancey leans forward, watching with glittering eyes the descending cards. The suspense is terrible to him. There seems an age between the fall of each.

"Quicker, Brabazon; quicker!" he whispers, hoarsely.

A half-smile of mocking disdain curls St. John's snort upper lip. The thick silken fringe fails to hide it.

"The ace! the ace! mine!" cries De Lancey.

"Your good fortune is simply marvellous," observes Darrell, politely. "A thousand this time."

For an instant his opponent ponders to reflect. The agreement is that the contest may be concluded at any time without respect to the players' position as to winnings or losses.

Would it not be wise to retire? He has won two thousand pounds; cannot that sum content him? He wavers. His glance falls on the note St. John has pushed forward, upon two others on which the loser's hand still rests.

He must have the whole five thousand or none. Evidently, luck is with him—as it has been the whole evening—and dead against Darrell.

"Nothing venture nothing have." He has ventured so far, and has been rewarded. Surely he may trust that fickle goddess, Fortune, a little further.

"The two of spades."

"The three of spades," rejoins St. John, carelessly.

Whether or not the carelessness be assumed, none can tell. Whether that languid insouciance cover anxious heart-throbs it is impossible to say. As Brabazon snuffles the cards Darrell proceeds to roll himself a cigarette, and ere he cuts in his turn the steady fingers complete the operation. As the cards fall he is occupied in

lighting it, without even looking at them. An execration from De Lancey tells the result.

"Bad form to swear, Mr. De Lancey," he remarks, calmly. "Can you not be content to let me win once?"

If a look could annihilate, St. John would disappear instantaneously from this mortal scene.

"Double or quits," shouts his opponent. "A fresh pack of cards. I stake again on the two of spades."

"And I on the three," says Darrell, puffing away composedly.

"Curse it all, Brabazon, can you not shuffle more quickly?"

"Mr. De Lancey," rejoins Brabazon, sternly, "you will be good enough not to swear at me. I will trouble you to find another gentleman to work for you."

"I beg your pardon," apologises the other, sullenly; "a couple of 'thou's' on a thowow make a fellow irritable, don't you see?"

"Twy a cigawette," suggests a voice, in ludicrous mimicry of the speaker's pronunciation.

A burst of laughter follows the sally. Mr. De Lancey, speechless with rage, looks daggers at nobody in particular.

"Attention!" cries Brabazon, mollified, throwing a card on the table.

Rapidly the little worthless stripe of board, upon which depend the transfer of four thousand pounds, more than the entire earnings of many an honest man's life, follow each other.

"Lost again, by Jove!" exclaims a looker-on, of quicker sight than the rest.

"Double or quits once more!" screams the loser, great drops of perspiration standing out on his forehead. For God's sake, Brabazon, be quick. I choose my card again—the two of spades."

"And I the queen," laughs Darrell, softly. "It is time I did homage to her majesty."

There is a dead silence. It is the final deal.

Eight thousand pounds tremble in the balance. Should De Lancey win St. John has still two thousand pounds with which to tempt Fortune; should St. John win, the game is at an end, he will have cleared the board.

He alone wears an unmoved countenance, but even his iron nerves are strung to extreme tension. Unseen in the excitement, he drops the cigarette between his knees, setting his foot upon it, and his fingers fasten upon the rim of the chair on which he sits, calm as a statue, as though they would press through the solid wood.

"Ah!"

It is an involuntary sigh from some of the spectators as the ace of spades drops. For the fraction of a second they are deceived. A simultaneous exclamation.

"Double or quits!" shrieks De Lancey.

"Pardon me—" St. John commences, urbanely.

Then he stops, for his opponent has fainted. The card that evoked the last sigh was—the queen of spades!

Even Darrell feels sick and giddy.

"Take care of the notes, Brabazon," he whispers. "I will return almost immediately."

He is standing in the clear starlight. Cool night breezes fan his fevered brow. For a moment, as a thought of pity for his late antagonist sweeps across his mind, he feels tempted to return the spoil.

Then, through a vista of departed years, he sees himself as he was in his bright, fresh youth, ere this man led him hither and thither, and plundered him, under the name of friendship, of far more than his gains to-night.

"Nemesis is just," he cries, bitterly. "But, by Heaven's help, I will never gamble more."

Brabazon meets him as he turns to re-enter the house.

"Where is De Lancey?"

"I do not know. He stumbled away to his own rooms when he came to himself. Pooh! never waste a thought on such a scamp. He will recoup himself at this 'hell' in a year or two."

"Brabazon," exclaims St. John, earnestly, "I am about to say something a man might resent

as an insult, unless it were spoken by one of his closest friends."

"My dear fellow, you do me the highest honour. I would rather have your friendship than that of a prince. The way you took the shine out of that villain, De Lancey, was—was—was prime, in fact. You were as cool as a cucumber all the time."

Darrell smiles, wearily.

"I cannot take credit, it lies in my blood I fancy. You know the family motto, 'Dare all, dare all.'

"By Jove, yes. 'Dare all,' that is the origin of your name, I suppose?"

"It was spelled with an 'a' or an 'e' indiscriminately in the good old times when the heads of the house had to employ a monk to write it for them."

"Well, what were you about to tell me?"

"In the first place, that I have this instant solemnly abjured all kinds of gambling."

"A very good thing too if you include the turf. You have lost about as much money upon it as any man in England who still defies the Jews."

"And in the second, that I want you, dear old man, to take back the five thou' I won on the Derby and never say a word about it."

"Look here, Darrell," cries the other, impetuously, "how much did I pull off you the first bet we had?"

"A thousand."

"And the next?"

"I won three hundred back again."

"And the next?"

"I forgot," replies St. John, evasively.

"Then I do not. Twenty-five hundred, a cool three thousand two hundred altogether. Did I ever offer to return the winnings?"

St. John is silent.

"Had I done so what would have been your reply?"

St. John extends his hand.

"You forgive me for asking you, Brabazon?"

The tears came into the youngster's eyes as the question is put.

"Forgive you?" he says, sawing away at the proffered hand. "Darrell, there is not a thing in the world I would not do for you if you called me 'friend,' and asked it."

"Do you mean that simply on the generous impulse of the moment?"

"I mean it, I swear by—"

"Hush! that will do, dear boy. On the honour of a gentleman—you can have no greater oath."

"On the honour of a gentleman."

"Promise me then you will stop betting when your total losses in any one year reach five thousand pounds, and that you will never stand to lose more than that amount upon a race or any other event."

Brabazon hesitates.

"Dear old chum, and dear friend," says St. John, laying a hand kindly on his shoulder, "fifteen years ago I was much what you are now. I had a fair reputation, and an equally fair estate. I lost the last as you are losing yours, and from sheer recklessness the first went also. I have never spoken to any man on the subject so feelingly as I do to you to-night; the role of cynic is easier to play than that of preacher. Will you promise?"

Again the hands meet in a cordial grasp.

"I promise, on the word of a gentleman."

Darrell's manner recovers its usual carelessness.

"Shall we walk homewards together?"

"If you will. Take the roll of notes, I would rather not be garotted for the sake of them."

Through the brilliant chambers of the "respectable house," where players are intent now on their own possible gain or loss, and have hardly a look to bestow as the friends pass out into the London night—where even in the coolness and the darkness air is impure still, and a breath of wind brings the fragrance of a noisome back-alum, or the reek of a steaming cook-shop—pass the man of thirty-five and the boy of one-and-twenty, friends—close friends, henceforth.

It is yet but half-past one in the morning. Many people still throng the pavements in some streets through which they go; stylishly-dressed men and bedizened women for the most part. Only in the quiet back streets and deserted squares does the teeming world appear to be snatching brief repose.

But quiet places are to be avoided rather than populous ones, whilst that little roll of paper lies in Darrell's breast-pocket.

Since they crossed its threshold no allusion has been made to the house they have left. As by common consent all topics connected with it are avoided.

"I go into the country this afternoon," says St. John, abruptly. "I have a sudden longing upon me for green trees and shady places, and clear, rippling water. I wonder how poor wretches feel who have to live always in the fog, and the smoke, and the unsavoury stench, whose dreams of the country are of an amplified Regent's Park, whose thoughts of a lark are connected with a spit or a poulticer's shop, whose ideas of the blackbird and the mavis are drawn from a bird-fancier's window."

"London is a jolly place enough," remarks practical Brabazon.

"For us, who quaff its pleasures till they pall upon us; who spend our lives in seeking amusement, and find it here condensed and spiced to the utmost—yes. By-and-bye the pleasures will begin to bore you, dear boy, and you will see the sadder side of the picture. I do not mean that your existence will become more melancholy. I have marred my own, never mind how, beyond redemption, but it is not of that I thought. To me bustling London streets have an undercurrent of sadness unutterable. Watch the keen faces of the men who crowd and jostle you, they tell of a constant struggle, a perpetual race, a ceaseless striving after, not wealth, as some would tell you, but the bare means of existence. Look at care-worn faces pushing by you on the pavement. Do you ever see a happy one? Think how their minds must be ever strained and turned to the same key. Even as they walk you see their lips moving."

A figure glides from under a gas lamp, and lays a hand on the speaker's arm, looking into his face with a smile.

What a smile! What a miserable attempt at allurement! What a feeble mimicry of mirth in the contortion of the thin lips! What wretched painted lie is this?

She has sham roses on her cheeks, a sham complexion of white and red, but for these the face were corset-like in its palor. How the cheek bones stand out! How emaciated is the frame!

"Heaven help you, my girl!" says Darrell, compassionately.

"Heaven won't, and man won't, and women are fiends!" cries the girl, with a savage laugh.

They have stopped under the lamp, and St. John's hand has found its way to his pocket. How the poor creature's haggard eyes pursue it! How they glare at the handful of loose silver and the gold coin or two he withdraws! His fingers select and extend a coin. She holds it up to the light. A sovereign!

Poor wretch! She throws a feeble arm round the lamp-post, rests her head upon it, bursts into a passion of sobs and tears.

They shake her frail frame so convulsively she sways a little, as though about to fail.

Darrell's arm encircles her waist. Sobbing still she leaves the support and clings to him. Her head falls upon his shoulders, but he does not shrink. He stands gravely looking down upon it with ineffable, dreamy compassion in his eyes, and the sobs grow calmer.

"Come, come, my lassie, look up. Keep a brave heart."

At the cheery tone she lifts her head. It is a young face, prematurely aged. She is hardly a woman in years. Hardly a woman "in years." That is what the black sheep of society, the reckless cynic thinks. Reputable members of the flock would unsee her perhaps altogether.

"Oh! God bless you, sir! God bless you! God bless you!"

It is a wail of blessing, dying away in broken

sob. It is who ought Of what at priests But St. holy name is sweet to "Have kindly."

"Not a to-night, yourself."

A trem transparent and select. St. John

Timid streets like her lips to "God be It is her "Are you

"Tired able eyes St. John

"Go to leave it. As Dar pocketbook notes. "I am

says. There which imp

"What you think? "Spendifery, the better adv.

His co. minute. "Did address?"

"Not good work so badly establish

CONFIDENTIAL attractive advocation

ELDERLY women's

C. F.: E. S.:

OLD G. squire's, "Wound Rustic surr, an'

O. G.: won't do through

Rustic at the the

PRETTY Woolwick

Bob S. ain't bad.

PRETTY back?"

Bob: "we-a-j-

LOWTH Hon. Ja. opinion.

"ANY The wide

sobs. It is the cry of a poor, abandoned creature, who ought hardly to dare call upon her Maker. Of what avail is it to the man who scoffs alike at priests and creeds?

But St. John lifts his hat reverently at the holy name notwithstanding, and the benediction is sweet to him.

"Have you any money beside?" he asks, kindly.

"Not a halfpenny—not one."

"Perhaps you had better not show the gold to-night," he suggests, thoughtfully. "Help yourself," and he tenders the silver again.

A trembling hand, that might be almost transparent were it not dirty, flutters over it and selects the smallest coin.

St. John looks on with approving eyes.

Timidly this brazen, flaunting girl of the streets lifts the edge of his dust-coat and presses her lips to it.

"God bless you!" she says again, chokingly. It is her only formula of thanks.

"Are you tired of the life?"

"Tired?" The tone and the hopeless, miserable eyes answer him.

St. John takes out a letter, tears off a blank leaf and writes a name and address upon it.

"Go to that lady and she will help you to leave it. Good night."

As Darrell returns the letter he puts the pocketbook in which lie the Bank of England notes.

"I am glad she did not try to rob me," he says.

There is an acid sarcasm about the tone which impresses Brabazon.

"What will she do with your sovereign do you think?"

"Spend it to bedizen herself with tawdry finery, that she may pursue her avocation to better advantage," sneers the cynic.

His companion ponders the reply for a minute.

"Did you give your own name with the address?" he inquires, at length.

"Not I. The lady is a good-woman—a very good woman; but no person in London thinks so badly of me as she, or has done so much to establish for me an evil reputation."

(To be Continued.)

FACETIÆ.

CONFIDENTIAL FRIEND (to elderly and not unattractive spinster): "So, dear, you've given up advocating women's rights?"

ELDERLY SPINSTER: "Yes, I now go in for women's rights."

C. F.: "Women's rights! What's that?"

E. S.: "Widowers, my dear!" Punch.

DISPLACEMENT.

OLD GENTLEMAN (military man, guest of the squire's, conversing with smart-looking rustic): "Wounded in the Crimean were you? Badly?"

RUSTIC: "The bullet hit me in the chest here, sur, an' came out at me back!"

O. G.: "The deuce! Come, come, Pat, that won't do! Why, it would have gone right through your heart, man."

RUSTIC: "Och, faix me heart was in me mouth at the thoiime, surr!" Punch.

DIGNITY.

PRETTY COUSIN: "Well, and how do you like Woolwich, Bobby?"

BOB SNOOKER (gentleman cadet): "Oh, it ain't bad."

PRETTY COUSIN: "And when do you go back?"

BOB: "A—at Woolwich we don't 'go back,' we—a—join!" Punch.

LOWTHER-ARCADIA.—Ireland under the Right Hon. James Lowther, according to his own opinion.

"Any sort of consistency is better than none." The widower who was nearly broken-hearted at

the departure of his mother-in-law, yet tried to console himself by marrying a monthly nurse, was after all a man to be respected. Judy.

ALF FOR HER.

SHE: "Not married yet, Alf?"

HE: "No, how could I be, when you are not?"

Fun.

A MISUNDERSTANDING SOMEWHERE.

ELDERLY PARTY: "Have these herrings roes?"

FISHMONGER: "Not they, mum; same price as ever at the hold shop. Two for three a'pence."

Fun.

THE BEST BAIT FOR EEL-CATCHING.—A "cochin-eel" paste.

Fun.

VERA'S VENTURE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"So Fair Her Face," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XLIV.

WARNED IN TIME.

Yet the first bringer of unwelcome news Hath but a losing office; and his tongue Sounds ever after as a sullen bell Remembered knelling a departed friend.

"I HARDLY understand you, I think, Mrs. Downing."

It was Mrs. Delamere who spoke in her haughty manner to the old housekeeper, who was wringing her hands after the fashion of nervous folk, and trembling as if she were in an ague fit.

"It's true what I have told you, ma'am," she said, looking imploringly at Vera's impulsive face. "It was one of the Raybrook people who heard all about it and told me. Betty Bird has been had up there and has told all she knows, and signed a paper, and it's all known."

"All what, pray?"

Vera's tone was as cold and her manner as defiant as if she had nothing whatever to do with the question in hand, and Mrs. Downing looked at her with astonishment, and wondered if the story which she had heard, and which was the simple truth, was not a fabrication altogether. It was impossible, she thought, for anyone with such a secret in one's breast to brazen it out as Mrs. Delamere did.

She had had a pretty truthful account of what had passed given her, and, coupling it with the drunken utterances of Betty Bird, which had been curious, to say the least of them, of late, she had arrived at a tolerably accurate notion of the state of the case. Vera had been a good mistress to her as far as justice went, though she had never been affectionate and considerate like Nellie was, and she thought if she could warn her in any way and help her to stave off the consequences of what was happening she would.

She was not a little dismayed at the way in which her advances were taken. Vera elected to know nothing about it and received her story with apparent incredulity. She hardly knew how to answer the insolent look and words, but part of the tale told her had been that her mistress was in danger of being arrested for conspiracy and fraud, and it behaved her to warn her if possible.

"All about your being Mrs. Bird's daughter—at least, Mrs. Westleigh's," she replied, timidly, "and they say, ma'am, that if you stay here you will be taken up."

"Really, Mrs. Downing, I must trouble you not to repeat such nonsense to me."

And the haughty face never altered, nor did the light fade out of the big dark eyes. Not a muscle stirred, and yet the heart under the rich lace and silk that lay on it was beating tumultuously, and the room seemed for one brief moment to swim round with the guilty woman as she listened to the story that was by now in every mouth in the village.

"I wonder at you," she went on. "You surely have more sense than to listen to all the silly stories that are brought you by anybody's servants. Come in."

There was a knock at the door, and a man entered with a note.

"Immediate I was to say, ma'am," he said. "There's no answer."

Mrs. Delamere opened it and read.

"I will attend to it at once," she said, and then turned to her housekeeper.

"I really shall have to make a change, Mrs. Downing," she said, with icy coldness, "if you show yourself so weak-minded any more. What you can have heard to make such a strange story out of I don't know. I beg you will not repeat it to anyone else."

She swept out of the room haughtily, after giving some unimportant orders about dinner, and the housekeeper looked after her in astonishment.

"Is she mad?" she asked herself, "or have I heard some cock-and-bull story? No. It was true, I am sure of it, and I wanted to warn her. Well, well, she must go her own way. It is a bad one, I fear, for her, but it will be a good one for us if it brings dear Miss Nellie back."

Mrs. Delamere went to her own room with the note crumpled in her hand. She found her maid there sewing, and dismissed her with a few words about her work. She would ring for her in half an hour, she told her, and the woman looked at her with critical eyes.

"What is wrong?" she said to herself. "Something is. Is it all come out, I wonder? That old woman's going up yonder boded no good to her. I must watch my mistress. I don't think she will ring for me this morning."

She heard the click of the key as Vera locked herself in, and she feared she scarcely knew what. Women like Mrs. Delamere, when driven to extremities, were not nice as to what they did, and she shivered for fear her mistress should take some dreadful means of getting out of her troubles. She need have had no fear. Vera Delamere was not of the order of women who go to the next world for the solution of the worries that surround them in this. She was sitting for a moment to collect her thoughts on the couch in her dressing-room with the letter in her hand.

"Mrs. Delamere," she said, scornfully, "they cannot take THAT away from me, at any rate. Curse him. He has been at the bottom of it all."

The note was from Belton Leicester, and was short and to the purpose.

"For her sake I write to give you a chance. All is discovered. Your mother has made a full confession of the relationship, and I know how the fraud on the letters was perpetrated, and how you practised on the health and life of the girl Wilson. I was present when you made your last purchase at the druggist's shop in London, and I heard them of the other. The proprietor of the shop is well known to me, and will be ready with his evidence. Exposure and disgrace are certain if you remain at Milverstone."

"For HER sake," Vera repeated, scornfully, looking at her own handsome face and splendid figure in the glass as she spoke. "Everything is for her sake—an insignificant, round-faced baby, as fit to rule here as to fly. Curse her. Why did she not die as we thought she did? They would never have stirred up the mud in that case."

She was mistaken there. The squire would never have allowed her to reign at the Grange when once his senses came back to him, and he shared the curses that she thought if she did not speak them. She opened a little desk that lay on her dressing-table—a tiny thing, not much more than a toy in size, and dainty in its prettiness, as became the property of a fastidious lady like Mrs. Delamere, but it had a lock that was not to be picked by the most skilful, and was strong beyond the belief of anyone who did not try to break it.

Vera kept most of her most valuable documents in it. She mistrusted the cabinets and

bureau downstairs, for she knew that if her husband could get at what he wanted he would, with small scruple. Several times she had put money away and found it disappear, and, though she had said nothing, she resolved to take precautions for the future. She carefully looked over the contents of the desk, and moved about her room a little. Her maid, watching from a coign of vantage of her own, could not tell what for, but she made no noise.

Presently, almost to that damsel's entire discomfiture, for she scarcely moved away in time, Mrs. Delamere emerged from her room in walking attire.

"There was no need to ring for you," she said when she met her maid in the passage. "I am only going as far as the field by the oak copse—Mr. Delamere is there. I shall be back quite in time to dress for dinner. I have my boots on, I did not take them off just now."

The woman looked at her. There was nothing unusual in her manner. She had not put off her boots, as she said, and for her to throw on her heavy winter jacket and hat and go out on the estate was nothing out of the common for her to do. Down below she met Mrs. Downing.

"I shall be back in half an hour at most," she said. "Don't let them be late with dinner please."

She walked away with her usual elastic step and crossed the park to the place she had indicated. Neville was there she knew, busy with some workpeople. For there were times when he elected to be a very busy landlord indeed, and recent worry had driven him to making alterations and what he called improvements for the sake of distraction. He was talking to his managing-man when she got up to him and turned in some surprise at the sight of her; she walked about a good deal, but seldom came near any of the workpeople.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"Oh, dear no. I want you a minute, that is all."

He drew close to her to hear what she had to say, and a few rapid words passed between them. Then Mrs. Delamere turned away, and he looked after her with a face from which every vestige of colour had fled.

"Dinner in half an hour mind," she said. "You will hardly have time to dress."

"I will come directly."

The voice hardly sounded like his own as he answered her, and it was almost inaudible as he gave directions to the men to leave what they had to do till the morrow. The job was almost done, and they were at a standstill for some material which they could hardly hope to get that evening. He turned into the copse after he had given his directions, it was the nearest way to go to the house, and they saw him no more.

It was a curiously agitated and excited party at Squire Blennerhasset's, after the confession that had been wrung from Betty Bird. Nellie had broken down when it was all over and cried so bitterly that it seemed as if she would go into hysterics, but Belton Leicester told them to leave her alone. It was only the natural outcome of so much pent-up feeling. And he was right, she grew calmer and better after awhile.

He waited for her recovery and then he went up to her to say good bye.

"I cannot thank you as I ought now," she said. "I am too bewildered, too—"

"I am thankful enough in seeing you here once more," he replied, with a break in his voice. "It will be a happy thought for me to take away with me."

"Take away. Where are you going?"

"Wherever the fates may lead me. But I need not talk of that to-night. Is there anything more I can do for you?"

"Yes," she said, "one thing: Don't let them take her up. Don't let her be harmed for what she has done. It was a sore temptation, though I don't understand it yet, and I don't want to. But save them from the shame and disgrace if you can."

"I have already done so I hope."

"How?"

"I have sent Mrs. Delamere a note which will prompt her to immediate action or I am much mistaken in her. I don't think she will be arrested, Miss Rivers."

It was strange and sweet to hear her old name again in that familiar way, but it was very unreal. Just as she had fancied in London that she should wake from her dream and find herself at Milverstone again, so Nellie seemed to think now that she should presently find herself with Amy Darlington or Mrs. O'Callaghan, or in the pitiless streets in the wet. She could not realize yet that she was once more amongst her own people and close to the home she had grieved so to lose.

It seemed more unreal still when late in the evening messenger came from Mrs. Downing to know whether her master and mistress were at Raybrook. Mrs. Delamere had gone out about an hour before dinner time, saying that she was going to Mr. Delamere, and the men had seen her with him. They were to be home in half an hour and they had not been seen or heard of since.

CHAPTER XLV.

DOUBTS AND FEARS.

Our doubts are traitors,
And make us lose the good we oft might win
By fearing the attempt.

MR. VENABLES, hurrying down from London to see to all the affairs that seemed in such confusion at Springfield, was met at the station by Belton Leicester going in the opposite direction—the young surgeon running away from himself and going to town to make arrangements for someone to succeed him in the practice at Springfield.

He had done his work. Nellie was restored to her friends, and would be in her old home in a very little while, and all that was left for him to do was to go away and try to forget the infatuation that had made him love her. He could not be near her and not speak it. That one brief moment when he had held her in his arms had told him that much. He could not run the chance of meeting her day by day and keep silent. Flight was the only thing for him. Even if she were willing how could he, a poor country surgeon, ask the mistress of Milverstone Grange to be his wife? Would not all the world, and Nellie herself too perhaps, scout him as a fortune hunter and reproach him with wanting payment for the service he had done her?

It was not to be thought of. He must go, and never if he could help it go near Milverstone again.

He greeted the lawyer cordially and gave him a hurried account of what had happened.

Mr. and Mrs. Delamere had not returned, and Betty Bird had also disappeared. Her retreat had been accelerated by a note which she found at her cottage after her visit to the squire's house. She had not hurried herself to go back, preferring to make a détour and avoid the village.

Sue had never been in very good odour and she was half afraid, now that Nellie had been found and was actually back again, of what might be said or done to her if by any chance the news had got abroad of what had been passing at Raybrook.

Sue found the note and acted on it. It had been brought by a boy, her daughter said, and was short and to the purpose.

"We are going. You had better do the same. The means enclosed."

That was all, but she understood it, and in the morning the neighbours found her cottage empty as far as its mistress and her daughter were concerned. The furniture was left, but the pair had managed to carry away all that was of any value in the way of clothing. They had gone without beat of drum and Springfield thought itself well rid of them.

Mr. Venables was rather vexed that Vera

Delamere should have been able to get off in that noiseless fashion. He would have liked to see her well punished for her impudent fraud, which had not been discovered because it had not been suspected. The manipulation the letters had received had been managed with such wonderful delicacy that it was almost impossible to find it out. They had been written by Vera's own mother in full confession of the fraud that had been practised with regard to the child, and had been so worded that a very trifling alteration made them appear to have been the work of Sir Darcie's own wife.

The hand-writing bore sufficient resemblance to that of Lady Rivers to pass amongst all but those who had known her so intimately as to be able to recognize every line from her pen. The two ladies had both the running, school-girl style that is so difficult to distinguish from any other of its class.

"And what have they taken with them?" was the lawyer's first question when he heard of the flight of the master and mistress of Milverstone. "She was not the woman to go away empty-handed if I read her character aright."

"I don't know—I don't think anyone knows any more than that they are gone," replied Belton Leicester.

"They should never have been allowed to go," the lawyer said, gravely. "They may have stripped the place for ought we know."

"I don't think they had time to do that. I fancy scarcely an hour elapsed from the time of their being warned to their departure. They had been missing some time before we were told."

"And who warned them pray?"

"I did."

"I thought as much. And she told you to, I suppose?"

"She was sadly troubled at the idea of any steps being taken towards Mrs. Delamere's apprehension."

"And you would have done her bidding if you had known that that woman was off with all the family plate. It strikes me that Miss Nellie Rivers can wind you round her little finger."

"She will not do so any more. I shall not return to Springfield if I can help it."

"And why not, pray?"

"For the reason you have just given. Good bye, Mr. Venables. This is my train."

"That's a nice young fellow, but he's a fool," quoth the lawyer to himself as he lost sight of Belton Leicester. "But he'll keep—he'll come back to Springfield yet, or I know nothing of mankind. Miss Nellie was in love with him even when she was going to make herself miserable by marrying the other fellow. Silly child, why did she run away? All this mischief would have been over sooner, I daresay, if she had stayed here."

Mrs. Delamere had been wise. She had touched very little that was not hers by purchase, but she had taken care to have a considerable sum of money at her command. Her bankers wondered sometimes at the large demands she made upon them. They had little idea that she was preparing for some such catastrophe as had actually occurred.

Mr. Venables was cordially received at Raybrook, and took Nellie in his arms with a kiss and a blessing as if she had been in very deed his own child.

"The world will deem me a blind bat for the future," he said, "but the wisest of us may be deceived sometimes, and your father was to blame, my child. He always made me think there was something wrong by his mysterious manner about this very business. He should have told me all about it."

"He didn't tell me," the squire said, "till I found it out by accident. The fates were against us in that accident of mine. I should have bowed my lady out at once but for that."

"All's well that ends well," Mr. Deacon said, warmly. "But for all that has befallen her we should never have known perhaps how dear this little girl was to us all. Sir Wilfred and Lady Rivers will rejoice equally with us, I am sure."

That they did, arriving the next day, and

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being with Nellie when she once more crossed the threshold of her father's house, its mistress.

To say that Springfield was in a state of temporary insanity was to speak mildly of the state of things. The village went mad, and was not to be restrained from doing all sorts of wild things in its excitement, the wrecking of Betty Bird's cottage being the most mischievous. It was well for that notorious old lady and her daughter that they were out of the way. They might have suffered in the general rejoicing.

The servants were somewhat astonished at the courtesy with which they were treated. Nellie did not propose to keep those who had been hired by Vera. She would have her own back again as far as she could get them, but she behaved with kindness and generosity to those who were leaving, and even accepted the services of the fine French maid till she could get her faithful Wilson back again.

Her uncle and aunt insisted on a grand rejoicing on her return, but Nellie would far rather have settled down quietly and begun her life again where she had left it off when she went out into the darkness desolate and alone.

Milverstone was much as she had left it. Vera had had the good sense and taste not to disarrange the old house, or introduce any anomalies in the way of modern furniture. Willing hands were there in plenty to make it all as it used to be "for dear Miss Nellie," and Mrs. Downing seriously hindered herself in her efforts to have things nice by the copious weeping in which her joy made her indulge.

Belton Leicester was not there to see the joy. He was in London trying for a berth in an emigrant ship. He was tired of England he told his friends who were surprised at his sudden determination, and thought a little roving would clear away the cobwebs out of his brain. Most people thought he was out of health. He looked ill enough to warrant the supposition, but those who were acquainted with him best at Springfield knew better.

He wrote candidly and frankly to the squire and his wife and told them that he could not stay where Nellie was.

"Give her my dear love," he wrote. "I may write those words now when I shall never see her again—and tell her that wherever I am I shall pray for God's blessing on her and hers. She will never be out of my thoughts as long as life is left to me. I am going to Sierra Leone in the steamer *Candace*, and if I never return, as is very likely, the colony isn't the healthiest in the world, I shall be the first to meet her when she too passes 'the silent river and waits for the unbarring of the golden gates.'"

He had a lodgings not far from where the ship was to sail from, he told them, and he should be very glad if they would write to him the very latest news from Springfield. It would be something to take with him when he lost sight of England. He was very busy inspecting and arranging. His help had been asked in the matter of stores, and he was glad to do anything that would occupy him completely.

"That's not a healthy letter," Mr. Blennerhasset said to his wife, when he had read it. "The lad is just going to fling away his life for a crotchet."

"He shan't do it," she replied, eagerly. "Why, this is worse than the emigrant ship scheme. Sierra Leone indeed. It's just a big graveyard for Europeans."

"I wish we could stop him."

"I've a notion we can," the lady replied. "When is he going? does he say?"

He did not say for certain. But it seemed that it would not be for some weeks. The ship was not ready and there were many things to settle at Springfield. His successor was to be the gentleman whom Nellie had once called, somewhat disrespectfully, "the red-haired man," and he was already installed, to the sorrow of most of the village. He was quiet and clever and there was nothing to dislike in him, but he was not Mr. Leicester.

Altogether, though Nellie was very happy in her restoration to her home and friends, there was a dash of bitterness in her cup of joy. She knew full well why Belton Leicester had re-

solved to go away and she could do nothing to stay him. It gave her a sore heart pang to think of his leaving England for ever, and there was a sad and anxious look on her fair young face in the midst of her fresh happiness.

It made a sad blank in the festivities of her homecoming to miss the dark, earnest eyes that she had come to remember so well and to look for so eagerly. The brief time she had been in Belton Leicester's company when he brought her home had seemed like Heaven to her, it was a feeling she had never had for Neville Delamere. The shock of his desertion had been very great, but there had come with it a sense of freedom that was more than the sorrow. Mr. Leicester's defection made her heart ache with a keen pang, and she could hardly bear to hear the gossip about him and his motives that came to her on all sides from unthinking folks who knew nothing of the state of affairs.

And so the days wore on till she had been at home three weeks, and the owners of the *Candace* began to advertise her departure for a date not very far off. Nothing whatever had been heard of Mr. and Mrs. Delamere. They had disappeared entirely, and Nellie would not have them sought for. She chose to believe that Mr. Shackleton was innocent of any complicity in Vera's strange plot, and refused point blank to have any inquiries made into the affair. Mr. Venables was very angry at what he called her foolish leniency, for he felt quite sure in his own mind that the clever and somewhat unscrupulous lawyer had known of the fraud if he had not actually helped to perpetrate it.

However that might be it was never discovered and Mr. Shackleton went his way as successfully as if his hands were quite clean in the matter, and always spoke of Mrs. Delamere in terms of admiration as being a clever woman who could hoodwink even an experienced lawyer like himself.

CHAPTER XLVI.

WHEN THE END CAME.

The book is completed.
And closed like the day,
And the hand that has written it
Lays it away.

BELTON LEICESTER sat alone in the lodgings he had taken for himself while the *Candace* was getting ready for sea, staring into the fire in dreary hopelessness. He had fought the fight and had come off victorious. He had done battle with himself as an honest man will, but he had been sorely wounded in the fray. He could think of Nellie now and pray with heartfelt earnestness that she might be happy in the life he had helped her to resume. But it was a dreary future that the flickering fire made out for him as he sat and made pictures out of the glowing coals.

At Milverstone it was spring already, the trees were beginning to break out into little nobby buds and the earth was beginning to crack and let undacious spring plants burst from their confinement. The sun shone and the air was like a glass of champagne in its invigorating quality. Here in London there were fog and cold that nipped the very bones and made everyone who could stay indoors and get as close to the fire as they could.

The air was clogged with thick, heavy vapour and came up from the river death laden for those who suffered from weak chests and throats. Tower Hill is not a lively place at the best of times and it looked duller and more miserable than ever on this particular afternoon. Only a fortnight remained of his stay in England and he was longing, how keenly he only knew, for it to pass away. He was broken in health, the fight had been a hard one, and his pale face and worn eyes gave token of weary days and sleepless nights.

Nellie in her bright beauty was ever before him and a longing desire to see her once more was on him that he could hardly conquer. He had seen Amy Darlington since he came to London, and she had talked to him about her.

"I am to go on a long visit to her, Mr. Leicester, as soon as she is settled," the lively actress said. "I shall never be thankful enough for the happy chance that led her to me."

Mrs. O'Callaghan wondered a little at the pale, serious gentleman who paid her a visit one day and talked only of her former guest. She showed him with tears, for she was a warm-hearted little woman, the kind letter that Nellie had written to her and the pretty remembrance she had sent her, besides more substantial benefits which had been conferred through Mr. Venables.

Nellie had forgotten no one who was kind to her in her trouble, and there was nothing but pleasant memories of her everywhere.

"It is well I am going so soon," he said to himself, as he took the poker and destroyed his fiery pictures. "I think I should go mad if I stayed in England. My darling, my darling! Will she ever know I wonder how dear she was to me? Ah, yes, in the world that sets this right. It will be clear to her then, but not here."

He had come to think of himself as never likely to return to England, and to look upon a grave in Sierra Leone as the certain end of his career. He was far too much alone. Had he had cheerful companionship he would scarcely have fallen into such a moody state.

The door opened softly as he sat poker in hand, but he did not turn his head.

"No tea, thank you, Mrs. Forrest," he said. "I don't want any to-night."

Mrs. Forrest made no answer. She seemed to be waiting for orders, for she did not go out of the room.

"And I shan't want any supper either. I am going out, I think. Leave a light, please, if I am late."

Mrs. Forrest did not answer, but she laughed—a little silvery laugh—that made Belton Leicester start up and drop the poker. It was not his landlady, it was Nellie or her ghost! He could not mistake the sound. He had never forgotten it since the day when he first saw her in a cottage at Springfield. She had laughed then and the sound had sunk into his heart for ever.

It was no ghost. Nellie stood there and with her faithful friend, Mrs. Blennerhasset. A great light shone in her face as he looked at them and told the elder lady that their mission was not for naught. Nellie's lips were quivering now and she did not speak. He was the first to break the silence.

"Nell—Miss Rivers," he said, in trembling agitation, "is it really you?"

"Herself and no other," the squire's wife returned. "And now please give us a cup of tea. We are nearly choked with the fog. Reverse your orders in our favour, if you please, and be hospitable. There's a good soul."

Very tremulous was her voice also. There was emotion to be hidden, and she was trying bravely to make this easy. He was like a man in a dream. He could not believe his eyes and ears, and half expected to wake up by-and-bye and find himself alone with the fire again. He rang the bell and gave his orders, and then went to Nellie's side.

"I never hoped to see you again," he said, taking her hand and caressing it. He would have liked to gather her to him and press kisses on her lips and cheeks. "It will be a gleam of Heaven to carry with me on my lonely journey. The time is drawing very near now. But I will not talk of myself. What has brought you to town? Is it anything that I can do for you?"

For answer Nellie looked at him for a moment with eyes eloquent of love and grief, and then bent her head on her hands and cried as if her heart would break. Her agitation had been pent up till now and it must have way.

"What has happened?" he asked of Mrs. Blennerhasset, in alarm.

"Nothing. Let her be a minute. She knows what is driving you away."

"Only my health and the necessity for change and—"



[HIS FATE.]

"And your love for her. Do you think we are blind and deaf at Springfield? She knows why you are exiling yourself and going to that pestilential place. She has come to—"

"To ask you not to go."

The words were Nellie's. Very faintly spoken but distinct and clear, and they were understood. The eyes that Nellie lifted to his face were full of love and truth, and he took her hands and drew her to him.

"You mean it?" he said. "You are not deceiving yourself or me?"

"No."

The word was spoken low but from her heart, and the arms that had longed so many weary months to encircle her clasped her as if they would never let her go.

"I can't believe it," he said.

"You may," said the matter-of-fact Mrs. Blennerhasset. "It is true. Do you think when we knew that you loved HER, and that she was grieving her heart out for you, that we should let you go away over the sea to die? Not a bit of it. It's an awkward thing for a woman to have to ask a man to marry her, but when a queen bestows her hand she has to do it, and it was pretty much the same here. Our girl knew you would go away with the words unspoken, and she knew how happy it would make you to speak them. It is not her boldness, it was mine. I brought her, and I should have spoken if she had not had the courage."

Belton Leicester did not sail in the Candace. It was rumoured he had come into a fortune and his place had to be filled up. It was a fortune such as few men drop into—a loving wife and a luxurious home. No one but those interested in the matter knew how it had come about and how Nellie herself had prevented his going away. Lady Rivers and her family never knew, and it was just as well perhaps. Her ladyship was a staunch friend to Nellie now, but she was as censorious as ever and apt to make spiteful remarks.

She was very well satisfied with the alliances

her own children were making, so she could afford to be charitable to Nellie and went no farther than to say that she thought it was "a pity" she should not have made a better match.

Springfield will never forget the wedding day that gave their darling Miss Nellie the popular young doctor for her husband. There was very little grandeur, Nellie would leave all that for the two weddings in Sir Wilfred's family, she declared; but there were plenty of hospitality and such a gathering of friends as was never seen.

Amy Darlington was there, a beautiful and happy bridesmaid, and Bessie O'Callagan and her husband, proud and pleased at the honour shown them, and there was feasting such as had not been known in the village since Nellie's mother was brought home a bride.

It was bright summer time when Belton Leicester and his bride set off on the first stage of their life's journey together, and they were home again after a long travel to keep such a Christmas as had not been held at Milverstone for many a year.

Nellie is a comely matron now with pretty children about her and a young Darcie to bear her father's name and inherit the old place, and the county has forgotten that the grand-looking squire was ever a parish doctor, and everyone looks up to him with blind and worshiping admiration.

Mr. and Mrs. Blennerhasset still rule at Ray-brook. Very old and feeble the squire is, but he likes to talk of the past and to tell everybody how Nellie's husband saved his life and reason for him by a timely operation.

His wife is at rest about her boy. Neville Delamere sleeps in an obscure cemetery beyond the Atlantic, and his wife is—well, perhaps the less said about the fashionable American actress the better.

The first intimation Belton Leicester and his wife had of the pair being still in existence was some five years after their marriage, when a letter came from Vera asking for assistance. It

was worded in her old haughty style, making the request almost a demand.

"It is not for myself," she wrote, "but for him. He is dying, and I cannot leave him to do anything which would keep him. The crumbs from your table would be more than we have had to subsist on for months. Do not grudge him enough to feed him for the last morsel of his miserable life."

Aid was sent promptly, Belton Leicester telegraphing to someone he could depend on in New York to see that everything was done that could be for the wretched man.

A few curt lines from Vera a very short time after announcing his death were all the further communication they ever had from her. She sent the certificate of his death and the precise locality of his grave and then vanished.

Not for long. In a very little while the American world was ringing with the fame, or rather notoriety, of the new actress, Madame Vera Delamere. She had not even the grace to keep her identity to herself, and the only thing they could do was to try and forget her.

She is Madame Vera Delamere still in the bills of remote country towns and out-of-the-way places, where faded looks and lost graces don't signify much. The world shrugs its shoulders at her now, and at the horrible old drunkard who hangs upon her.

Betty Bird found her way out to her daughter and helped to hasten Neville's end by her presence.

Mother and daughter are drifting with horrible rapidity on the downward road that leads to destruction, and it is easy to prophesy what the end of both will be.

They have faded out of the memory of Milverstone and there are not really many people who are in the secret of all that happened there, nor how daring a venture had been Vera's when she tampered with the letters she had found and made it appear that she and not Nellie was the heiress of Milverstone Grange.

[THE END.]

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[HOMeward BOUND.]

CRUEL BARBARA.

(A COMPLETE STORY).

CHAPTER I.

26TH SEPTEMBER, 187—.—This day I make the first entry in the diary I have promised myself to keep on the voyage home to my dear father and Miles—good, noble-hearted Miles—whose wife I am to be. Do I repent my promise now? No, no—a thousand times no. I am, I will be, true and loyal to him as he deserves.

If my faith wavered for a time, Miles shall never know, never have cause to doubt me. Perhaps it would have been better had I never gone to England, though then I should have died, they told me; had I never seen—No, I will not write his name, I will not even think it again.

Thank Heaven, I never allowed him to speak the words my heart told me he would have uttered had I shown him the least encouragement. Does he think me cold, heartless, I wonder? What matter? Better that he should do, he will the sooner forget me, as I must school myself to do him.

Yes, that dream is over, I must think of it no more. Every day now bears me further from the land in which he dwells to that where my future life will be spent. Many years of it, at least, though I daresay in the time to come Miles will bring me back to England.

Perhaps then I may meet HIM again, the husband of another, but not one who will love him as I do. Ah, no! not as I do. I have said I will not, I must not. As I might have done, rather, had I been free.

27TH SEPTEMBER.—I must make no more entries like that of yesterday. I will not even leave the page on which it was written, lest it should cause me to remember what I have vowed to forget. It has been a rough passage till now

since we left Portsmouth, nearly three weeks ago; so rough that I, not being a very good sailor, have kept my berth the whole time. I have not wanted for attention, though, and feel quite well and strong enough to go on deck to-day.

We passed Gibraltar on Friday, and this afternoon some time, Mrs. Calthorpe tells me the captain said at breakfast, we ought to catch a sight of Madeira. After that we shall probably not see land again till the Helicon has completed her voyage, and that may take quite three months, perhaps more, if we meet with contrary winds.

Here Barbara Fenton abruptly stops, as a comely-looking lady enters her cabin and chides her good-humouredly for not being out of it.

"The air is delicious on deck," says Mrs. Calthorpe, "and the sea much smoother. Come, child, put on a hat and something over your shoulders, for it is not too warm, and get back some of the colour you have lost."

Barbara obeys, and in a few minutes afterwards stands upon the poop, gazing with an air of enjoyment over the bright, dancing waters. A shoal of porpoises is rolling and tumbling among the leaping waves, a fresh breeze fans her cheek, and her eyes sparkle with a light of new, fresh life.

Above, from every yard, flutters a cloud of spreading canvas; forward the crew is busy on the forecastle; upon the poop, where Barbara sits, are gathered groups of passengers, some, from their bright, clear complexions, evidently making their first voyage to the land of rice and rupees, others, whose yellow faces and thin figures are unmistakably point them out as Anglo-Indians, returning, after a holiday in Europe, to the scene of their labours.

Barbara Fenton herself belongs to the latter category. Not in the matter of a yellow visage or angularity of outline, indeed, for her complexion is pure and fair as that of a lily—almost too colourless, perhaps, for perfect beauty, and her figure, if slender, is perfect in its grace. But she is returning, in the care of Major Cal-

thorpe and his wife, to the country where she was born, whence, two years ago, she had been sent to spend a time in England as a last chance of preserving her life.

The experiment has been so far successful that she is going back to her widowed father, who holds the post of barrack-master at Dumbudum, with bodily health renewed, but, alas! a heavy weight at her heart, the cause of which may be partly divined from the first entry in her diary.

She is young—only twenty-one now—yet she has been engaged for nearly three years, was to have been married some time ago, but that her illness necessitated a postponement, to Miles Kenyon, the managing partner of the Calcutta branch of a great banking firm.

It is a good match for her, in a worldly point of view, for Barbara's father, Captain Fenton, has nothing beyond his pay, while Richard Kenyon can afford a fine home at Garden Reach, has horses and carriages, and can settle an ample fortune on the woman he weds. In position, too, the banker has the advantage, for he comes of an old family, his elder brother being Sir Roger Kenyon, of Holme Lacey, Hampshire, while Captain Fenton has worked his way up from the ranks to the not very exalted position he holds, and has held for nearly a dozen years past, with no prospect of further advancement.

Nor, indeed, has he ever looked forward to anything beyond. Of humble birth, his parents being only in the class of humble tradesfolk in a northern town, George Fenton, the youngest of a large family, enlisted when he was but eighteen, and had never seen his home since. He soldiered in all parts of the world, and being of a steady disposition and fairly educated obtained promotion to the rank of colour-sergeant.

Among the first to land in the Crimea he received a dangerous wound at the Alma which prevented him returning to active duty till hostilities were nearly ended, but for which circumstance he had probably been advanced to a commission sooner.

At the close of the war his regiment was

ordered to India, whither he accompanied it with his newly-wedded wife, the daughter of a comrade, and Barbara was born while Mrs. Fenton was shut up in the Residency at Lucknow, her husband being at the time outside with the relieving force.

When they entered Sergeant-major Fenton, as he then was, found himself a widower, his wife having died in giving birth to Barbara during that horrible time.

The mutiny over, George Fenton obtained the reward for his gallant services in the shape of a commission, and soon afterwards was appointed barrack-master at Dum-dum.

It was a fairly lucrative post, and Captain Fenton, as he had now become, lived so quietly and economically, investing his savings at the same time, that Barbara would in time have been heiress to no inconsiderable fortune but for the failure of the bank in which, beguiled by the high rate of interest it offered, her father became not only a depositor but a shareholder, so that when the crash came he found himself liable to an extent far beyond his means, besides having lost the accumulated savings of years.

Utterly crushed by the calamity Captain Fenton gave way to despair. Not so much on his own account, indeed, as for Barbara, his pride, his darling, for whom he had pictured so bright a future.

What would that future be now? Especially should he die? Even if he lived he could not hope to retrieve the state of what he had lost. But for her he might, in his desperation, have solved the problem by a summary process, but he was not coward enough to leave his child unprotected, and faced the position into which his want of caution had forced him with so much of manliness as secured for him at least one friend in Miles Kenyon.

This younger son of a baronet should not of course have been in trade, but Miles was free from such prejudices of birth, and rather than remain a dependent upon his elder brother he sought and obtained work for which he was so well suited that, while yet a young man, he was taken into the firm which he had entered as ordinary clerk as junior partner.

True, the head of the firm was his mother's half-brother, but this fact would have had little weight had not Miles shown business aptitude and talents of no mean order—of such high standard indeed that when, on the failure of the Calcutta bank (with which his firm was closely connected), it was determined to re-establish it on a different basis, Miles was chosen to carry out the scheme, and did so with such success as fully warranted his uncle's confidence in him.

The details would, of course, be out of place here, and it is only necessary to give a bare outline as a means of showing in what manner Miles's acquaintance with Captain Fenton was brought about.

It was a fortunate one for the old soldier upon whom Fate had played so slyly a trick, for, in the first place, Miles Kenyon's masterly management of affairs so far relieved the old shareholders that they found themselves freed from further liabilities, and in the next it proved the commencement of a friendship which increased with knowledge of each other, and led in time to a prospect of even greater fortune for Barbara when Miles went to her father as a suitor for her hand.

She was only seventeen then, but womanhood develops earlier in the east than in our colder northern climes; besides, Miles Kenyon did not press for an immediate marriage, not even a definite answer at once.

Of his own love for Barbara he felt no doubt, but he wanted to be sure of hers, and would have scorned to take advantage of the girl's inexperience or her father's gratitude.

"I can wait what time is necessary," he said. "I only speak to you now because I have made up my mind to win her for my wife if it is possible, and I think you ought to know."

Captain Fenton could have asked no better fortune for his child—indeed, after the first astonishment was over he declared, and truly, that he would do all in his power to promote Miles's cause. But this Mr. Kenyon forsooth,

"I would rather fail than owe success to anything but her own preference," he said. "Let me win her, if I can, in my own way."

And so it was settled, Captain Fenton promising that he would keep the secret that had been confided to him till silence was no longer necessary.

And he was true to his word in the letter, though he was of too simple and unrefined a nature not to have betrayed himself a dozen times a day to anyone skilful enough to understand the hints he sometimes threw out.

But Barbara was too ignorant of the world to guess at their meaning. More of a child than most girls of her years, tender and loving as she was by nature, no thought of that all-absorbing feeling which comes to all sooner or later had ever disturbed her.

Perhaps it might have been otherwise had she not led so solitary a life, with hardly any other companion than her father, but as it was her heart and fancy were alike untouched, so that at length when Miles ventured to address her there was not even a grain of affection in the unfeigned surprise with which she received his confession.

Neither, when she had recovered from the shock of that surprise, was there anything in her mind but the honest conviction that she could give Miles Kenyon the love he asked for, and such was her answer, spoken shyly and modestly indeed, and not without such blushes and sweet confusion as only rendered her more precious to her enamoured lover, but unaffectedly and frankly.

Too frank, too ready was her acceptance not to have shown a man more experienced in woman's ways than was Miles Kenyon that her heart was as yet untouched. He had no fear, no doubt, however. True and loyal to the core himself he recognised in Barbara kindred qualities, a purity of thought, a gentle, clinging disposition that once she gave her faith would never waver.

The pity of it was, alas, that he could read no further, that he could not see he was to her no more than a dearly-prized friend, or brother, perhaps, but nothing else.

And yet there was no actual reason why he should not be more to her. True, he was nearly a dozen years older, but that is no very great disparity.

He was, too, if not what one calls a handsome man, pleasant to view, well-educated, and a gentleman—a man, indeed, whom in time it is most likely Barbara Fenton would have learned to love if—

If! Ah! how many homilies have been written with that little word for their text?

It is needless to go over ground so well trodden in this brief record. The date of their marriage was fixed, preparations already afoot, when Barbara was stricken with fever, recovering only to so small a portion of her usual health that it was evident no wedding could take place for some time, and at last it came to this, that no cure was likely unless she had change of climate for at least a year, perhaps two.

Her absence was lengthened to the longer period, most of which she spent with one of her father's sisters in Yorkshire, a bustling, active, farmer's wife; and there, breathing day after day the fresh, invigorating breezes of the moors, Barbara regained all she had lost of health, and more, but at a cost to her peace of mind which made her oft-times think it had been better that she had remained in India to die rather than come to England to renew a life which must henceforth be to her a weary, heartbroken pilgrimage, parted, as duty, honour, and maidenly faith told her, she must be, from Austin Blyth.

That Austin loved her she knew—ah! how certainly; that his love would have found voice had she betrayed her own feelings she also knew, but thank Heaven she had been strong enough to be faithful to her plighted word.

Not a sign had she made, not a look had she given him that could afford hope, though in his presence all her senses were thrilled with a pleasure so exquisite as became almost pain.

Fearful of herself she sought, and successfully, to avoid the declaration which she perceived was imminent. So successfully indeed that at length the man for whom she would willingly have laid down her life could the sacrifice have served him, left Hunsdale with bitter wrath in his heart that he had allowed himself to be made the mock and sport of a coquette's wiles.

Poor Barbara! She deserved no such harsh judgment. True that at first, unconscious in her innocence of the quicksands on to which she was drifting, she had not attempted to disguise the pleasure she felt in Austin Blyth's society.

Truth to tell, the rough, uncouth habits of the Hunsdale youths in general were not calculated to impress her, and when Austin came, as he did shortly after she took up her abode in the moorland village, the manners and easy grace of the young surgeon attracted her at once.

There was a bond of union between them too, which served to place them almost from the first upon familiar terms, for Austin's father had been a medical officer in the company's service, and Austin himself, like Barbara, was born in the far East, and though he had gone home while yet a child retained sufficient recollection of his earlier years to make their acquaintance less formal from the very beginning than it might otherwise have been.

Well, well, these were pleasant times. Too pleasant, alas! not soon to have an end. What that end was has been said.

Austin Blyth departed, and in little more than two months afterwards Barbara also bade adieu to Hunsdale and her warm-hearted—if rough-mannered—Yorkshire relatives, and was on the seas once more on her return to her father and the man whose promised wife she was.

CHAPTER II.

The waves dance joyously beneath the vessel's keel, the winds are less boisterous for the first time since the Helicon left Portsmouth Harbour, the sky is bright and clear, a warm breeze is wafted over the waters.

Up in the rigging is perched a messenger from land, a dove with tired wings that has flown aboard from the island that appears hazy and indistinct upon the weather bow.

The poop is full of passengers, who, having till now, with few exceptions, preferred remaining below in their berths rather than face the elements, have at last ventured upon deck with signs more or less apparent in their faces of the rough ordeal they have lately passed through.

Barbara sits alone, gazing dreamily over the waste of waters towards that dimly undefined shore in the distance which is, they tell her, Madeira.

Major Calthorpe has ensconced her comfortably in a swing chair, with a wrap by her side in case she may find the air too keen, and having satisfied himself that she requires nothing more, has gone to the cuddy to his usual afternoon rubor.

Mrs. Calthorpe, having done her duty in seeing Barbara out of her cabin and on deck, has seated herself in a snug corner with a book, and is oblivious of everything save the dilemma in which the last chapter has placed the heroine who has been foolish enough, unwisely or unthinkingly, as it may be, to have involved herself in some little difficulty respecting two different gentlemen, both of whom fancy themselves to be the favoured individual, while, as a matter of fact, she gives no thought to either, but is bent upon the subjugation of a third, who is impervious to the lures by which she seeks to attract him to her side.

All is hushed and still, save for the dash of the waves against the vessel's sides, which gradually becomes fainter as the wind dies away and the surface of the ocean becomes smooth almost as a mirror. At sea there are no sounds of insects humming in the air, of leaves rustling, or the thousand and one signs of life which invariably fall upon the ear in the stillest landscape. All is a solemn hush, and lulled by the silence round her—for, impressed perhaps by the

calmness, her fellow-passengers have ceased their chatter—Barbara Fenton has fallen into a dreamy reverie.

Her thoughts have gone back to Hunsdale, to the wide, open, and health-laden moors.

"Shall I ever see them again, I wonder?" she muses, her fair, rounded chin resting in the hollow of her hand. "When I am an old woman, perhaps, but even if it is not till then can I ever forget? Ah, no! never, never. I seem to see them now, to see upon them, alas! what I may never see more—his figure striding across the heather, his smile of greeting when he drew near me. . . . Never again—never again will that be. We are parted for evermore and—"

"I am glad to see you upon deck at last, Miss Fenton."

It is a pleasant voice that speaks, clear and manly, with certainly no tone in it that should cause alarm any more than the words, which are nothing but of ordinary civility, yet one or the other produces a most startling effect upon Barbara.

Startling, indeed, for her face, colourless enough by nature, pales to an almost deathly hue; her eyes dilate with—what is it? fear, or joy, or both combined? her lips are parted, and tremble as though she fain would speak, though no sound issues from them.

Can she be dreaming? she asks herself in mute wonderment. Has she gone suddenly mad? With an effort she turns her head, and then, standing before her, she sees the man who was last in her thoughts, who has been first and foremost there, indeed, for many a long day past.

Oh, the joy! the pain! which is it that she feels? That Barbara knows not, all she can realise in the present is that he is there, close to her, and she stretches out her hand with a low, inarticulate cry, which, strive as she will to hide it, conveys to Austin Blyth some consciousness of what feeling has evoked it.

"You are glad to see me then?" he asks her, with a smile.

"Glad!" but here a sudden chill remembrance checks the too free utterance that would tell him all too plainly what she must at every cost conceal, and she assumes a more conventional tone.

"Oh, yes, of course I am, very glad. It is so pleasant to meet an old acquaintance, though I don't understand—"

"How I came here. Of course not. And yet the explanation is very simple."

"How was it?"

"Shortly thus. When I left Hunsdale, where, as I think I told you at the time, there was not sufficient practice for a second medical man, the district is so abnormally healthy you know—"

"How shockingly selfish of the district," breaks in Barbara, taking refuge in persiflage from the agitation which she is afraid Austin Blyth will else perceive.

"Awfully," agrees the young man, falling into her humour. "As though doctors didn't want to live."

"Even though other people must die, or at least be ill, to enable them to do so," says Barbara. "But go on."

"With the account of how I came on board the *Helicon*? I will. When I got to London, nearly three months ago now, you know, I could find nothing that would exactly suit me," he does not tell her that one all-sufficient reason for this is that he was too much occupied in brooding over her memory to think of other matters, "and at last I took the first that offered. I heard that a surgeon was wanted for the *Helicon*, offered myself, the owners were satisfied with my credentials, accepted me—and voilà."

A sudden suspicion darts across Barbara's brain, and she glances up at him, half suspiciously, as she says:

"Did you—?" Then she checks herself as abruptly as she had commenced the question. "Did you know I should sail in the *Helicon*?" she has been about to ask. But how can she? It would sound either self-conscious or conceited. No, she cannot ask him that.

Austin observes her hesitation, possibly, for he has quick perception, guesses at what causes

it, and changes the subject. Just at present he has not made up his mind whether or not to tell Barbara that but for his certain knowledge that her passage to Calcutta was taken in the *Helicon* he would not be on board that vessel.

It might frighten her, and he thinks therefore that it will be better not to say. If she had put the question to him plainly, indeed, he would have no choice but to answer it as directly, but that not being so there is no absolute necessity that he should betray himself.

So he turns the conversation into another channel, speaks of old times and old friends at Hunsdale, of the happy days he has spent there—leaving her to infer from apparently chance phrases that the happiest were those on which he saw her—of his own prospects, though on these he, being a modest and withal a well-bred man, does not enlarge at too great length, of the few incidents which have hitherto enlivened the monotony of the voyage, but which Barbara has not of course shared in, till four bells is struck by the smart little midshipman of the watch, a gong sounds, and the poop is quickly cleared of passengers, who take their seats round the muddy table for that most serious business of the day, dinner.

"Shall I win her, after all, my darling, my pretty Barbara?" thinks Austin Blyth, when night has closed in, and all have retired save a few who remain on deck to smoke their last pipe or cigar under the starlit heavens. "I think I shall; that look she gave when she first recognised me was not an indifferent one; she is shy, that is all. I was a fool to leave Hunsdale and her as I did, but in following her here I have done the next best thing, perhaps a better than risking a refusal then. None can come between us here, she cannot avoid me if she would, and it shall go hard, even if she is indifferent to me now, which I am beginning to doubt, but I will turn that indifference to something warmer."

Could he see Barbara now and read what thoughts are busy in her brain, he would know that the task he has set himself is needless, that the winning, so far as her heart is concerned, has already been achieved.

Fortunately, Austin does not know this. Fortunately, because if he did, and presumed upon the knowledge to consider his cause successful, he would be making the greatest blunder it is possible for mortal man to make.

She loves him. From herself pretty Barbara Fenton does not attempt to conceal the fact, or gloss it over with some self-deceit. She loves Austin, ah! how dearly! how very dearly! Has she not set it down in her diary almost in the plainest words? To her there is no other man on earth like unto Austin Blyth, though, truth to say, he is not the hero or the demi-god to which she exalts him in her inmost mind, but only a frank, honest-hearted and right-minded young Englishman, good-looking enough, but not an Antinous. What matter for that, though, when she loves him? and what, pray, is the meaning of love except that it exalts even the commonplace into the heroic, and invests those upon whom it is bestowed with all the attributes that go to make perfection?

And so with Austin Blyth. To others he may be nothing out of the common, to Barbara he is all that is noble, knightly, and gracious. Yet will she have none of him. "Deep in her heart the passion glows, she loves, and loves for ever," yet has she determined if she cannot crush that love, she can at least suppress all outward sign of it, and she will do so, though her heart may break in the effort; she will be true to the vows that bind her, that she took willingly upon herself, and make Miles Kenyon a good, obedient, and a faithful wife.

So she determines, so poor Barbara! she will, if need be, do, though naught but misery and future loneliness may be her portion.

And the days go on, one after another, in the same monotonous fashion. There is no change, nothing to distract her thoughts, only the dangerously sweet companionship of the one man in the world whose happiness she would sacrifice all her own to secure, but whom she holds aloof from as far as practicable, never giving him the

opportunity he vainly seeks of declaring his passion.

How she prevents this she hardly knows, but she does, in spite of all circumstances that seem to favour him. Constant association, Mrs. Calthorpe's blindness to Austin's devotion—for that lady is aware of the girl's engagement, and would, in the exercise of her duties as chaperone, have no hesitation in enlightening Mr. Blyth if she suspected what is going on—all are useless, Barbara can ever find some means to evade the explanation she so dreads. And at last their voyage draws so near an end that but little more than a week remains of it, for they have entered the Bay of Bengal; four or five days at the latest, if the winds that have so far favoured them continue, will bring the *Helicon* to the Sandheads, and Barbara breathes more freely at the thought. Better Austin should think her heartless, a coquette, than know the truth—that she loved him, but was betrothed to another.

And that which she decides to be best at last Austin Blyth comes very near accepting as the true explanation of Barbara's behaviour, otherwise inexplicable as it is to him.

Very near, but not quite, for in his heart there is an unspoken but innate conviction that, let appearances be what they may, Barbara is no coquette. Nay, more, that if the eyes be indeed an index to the mind, hers is all purity and maidenly faith. He must find some way, or make one, if need be, to put her to the test.

But how? Of late she has seemed to avoid him even more persistently than ever. So markedly, indeed, that he must see it is intentional were it not for the remembrance of certain glances which he has caught directed towards him at times when she has believed herself unnoticed, glances so full of tenderness and yearning—unless he was only a vain, conceited fool who fancied what he deserved—as gave full warrant to his hopes.

"I WILL speak to her, though, and know my fate," is the resolution he arrives at, when half of that last week upon which he can reckon has passed.

And, lo! the chance he has sought so long and been denied seems his at last, for even as the thought forms itself Barbara appears upon the deck alone.

Austin looks around. There is no one within hearing, and with a quick, firm tread he crosses rapidly to where stands the slight figure whose every outline he knows so well, and halts beside her.

Then Barbara, as she looks round and sees who is the intruder upon her solitude, utters something between a gasp and a cry as she catches at the poop railing to support herself, for though it is night there is light enough from the brilliant southern moon to enable her to see the gleam in Austin's eyes, and she knows what words he is about to speak even before his lips part to give them utterance.

"Ah! be silent. Have pity on me—on yourself," she wails, breaking in upon the passionate torrent of speech which he is pouring forth. "I cannot, I must not listen. Spare me, I beg. I—I did not know—"

"Not know!" cries Austin, as she falters and breaks hopelessly down. "Can you say that truly, Miss Fenton? Barbara, what is it that prevents your giving me a hearing? You must have seen how dearly I love you, how—"

"Oh! hush, hush! You must not tell me that, indeed you must not," sobs poor Barbara, her heart throbbing with a wildly delicious rapture at his words, even though at the same time it is filled with despair. "I am sorry, so sorry, but it cannot ever be, you know," she adds, with a feeble attempt at dignity.

"I know nothing that can prevent it if you are willing," answers Austin. "I am not rich certainly, but neither am I a poor man, and—"

"Ah! don't say such things," bursts in Barbara, almost indignant—if she can feel such a sentiment towards him—that Austin should believe her capable of such considerations. "It is cruel, unjust. As if I would not willingly—I—I

mean, as though that would make any difference if—if I cared for you as you would have me."

"And do you not? Have I deceived myself then? No, I will not believe it. Barbara, my darling, look at me, tell me that is not the answer I must take, but that you will come to me to be my wife, my very own."

So ardently he pleads, with such persuasion in his accents—and his prayer too has so powerful an advocate in her own heart—that Barbara has scarce strength to resist. Yet resist she must, though how can she find words to tell him that which will wreck the happiness that else might be theirs?

She pauses, tearful and irresolute, while Austin waits with breathless eagerness for her reply.

So absorbed are both that neither notice how the deck, just now comparatively empty, is thronged with passengers who are talking excitedly together.

"Will you not give me some little hope, Barbara?" urges the young man. "I will not ask for more now. Only say that I may—"

"Barbara! my dear child! I have been looking everywhere for you," breaks in the agitated voice of Mrs. Calthorpe. "Oh! is that you, Mr. Blyth? Have you not heard?"

"Heard! What?" asks Austin, mentally cursing the interruption, till Mrs. Calthorpe's next words put even Barbara's expected answer out of his thoughts for the moment, so startling are they.

"There has been an accident," the lady explains, in a trembling voice. "The steward took a naked light into the lazarette, I hear, and something has caught fire. Come with me, Barbara."

And the two ladies disappear. A few moments longer and Austin hears fuller particulars.

The lazarette is in flames, and the officers and crew are all hard at work striving to subdue them.

The accident only occurred a quarter of an hour ago, and was so promptly discovered that in any other part of the vessel a few buckets of water would have amply sufficed to quell the fire, but unhappily a cask of spirits had caught.

Just as Austin has heard so much a cry of terror is heard from below. Voice after voice takes it up.

Women rush upon deck, screaming frantically, and for a brief space confusion reigns supreme. The burning spirit has some of it found its way into the after hold, loaded with light woollen crates full of merchandise of a most inflammable nature.

The lazarette is worse than a powder magazine, for it feeds the flames at every instant, and the vessel—an old one, timber throughout—is doomed.

After the first moment of dismay order is restored. The night is calm, the boats sufficient, and they are lowered at once, the women being first disposed of. Not till it is plainly to be seen that the fire has gained complete mastery, but that is soon beyond doubt.

Shivering and terrified the female passengers are one after another passed over the vessel's side into the boats lowered to receive them.

After all, there will not be room for everybody, and some of the crew are hard at work in the fore part of the vessel, as yet untouched, lashing spare spars together for a raft.

Austin has been helping to embark the women.

There is some little delay over one, an invalid, nervous and nearly mad with terror. While she is being lowered over the vessel's side he turns to the next.

It is Barbara.

Even in that moment of peril he speaks again.

"It may be that this parting is for ever," he says, holding her little hand in his, and looking earnestly into her eyes.

All around are too deeply engrossed to notice or to heed if they did notice, and he speaks, carelessly of bystanders.

"I don't want to force from your fears any words that you might otherwise refuse me, but

tell me, Barbara, was I presumptuous? Oh! darling, if it be willed that we shall never meet again, let me at least carry with me to the last the knowledge that I have not loved in vain."

"Oh! no—no! not in vain!" sob poor Barbara—and who shall blame her if in such a moment she is weak? "I do—I do love you, but—"

What else she may be going to say is lost, for her turn to be placed in the boat has come, and Austin helps her over the side as he has done the others.

No, not quite in the same fashion, for he has taken her in his arms and held her there for one brief, blissful minute, and when he releases her it is with the taste of her lips upon his, left there by the kiss she had not denied him.

An hour later and not a living soul remains on board the *Helicon*.

But none are lost, for the raft, finished in time, holds all that could not find room in the boats, and, if no sudden storm such as not seldom rises in the Indian seas creates a fresh danger, passengers and crew are saved, for even rowing will take the boats to Diamond Harbour in a few days, where rescuers will be found for those on the raft.

CHAPTER III.

HOME at last. After long absence, ending with a deadly peril, Barbara Fenton finds herself once more beneath the old familiar roof where so many of the earlier years of her life have been passed in unalloyed, because ignorant, happiness.

Ignorant, that is to say in so far that she had not then awakened to the knowledge of her own heart. Happy she had been, but it was with a child's unquestioning and unquestioning happiness that knows no deeper, stormier emotion than mild disappointment arising from petty griefs that leave no after trace.

Content with her lot, placidly believing that no better awaited her, sweetly obedient to her father, and mildly pleased with the lover who offered himself and his true, honest affection, never dreaming that in the future another might appear who would claim as his right that love which then lay dormant in her breast.

Now how changed is everything! Her eyes are opened, her senses fully alive to the mistake she has made. But, alas! it is a mistake that can by no means be rectified.

No, honour and duty alike forbid the base idea of playing Miles false, of breaking her plighted troth. Barbara is no casuist, and though she feels all the pain and horror of her position her course is plain, she must crush this love which she has foolishly allowed to fill her heart for another man, trample upon and subdue it at all cost of pain to herself and him, or if that is impossible she must at least hide it.

But, ah! the task of subduing our affections is a hard one, very hard, almost impossible to some, and so Barbara finds in spite of all her brave resolves.

For herself, she thinks, she could bear it all, but the thought that in doing right she is condemning another—and that other one to secure whose happiness she would gladly die—too wretchedness equaling if not surpassing her own, is torture to her. She blames herself too that she did not make her engagement known among her father's friends in England. Had she taken that precaution all would have been well, she thinks.

She has been home nearly a week. Hardly twelve hours after the boats had put away from the burning vessel they were discovered by one of the tugs that are constantly cruising about the head of the bay on the look-out for wind-bound ships, and taken aboard, another tug proceeding in search of the raft and what salvage might remain of the ill-fated *Helicon*. Not a life had been lost, fortunately, and crew and passengers were all safely landed in due course at Calcutta, where they were made much of and hospitably entertained according to their degree.

Barbara was met at the landing ghat by her

father and Miles Kenyon, for the news of the catastrophe soon spread, and was at once conveyed home and carefully tended, for though the rescue had been so speedily accomplished that no actual hardship resulted the shock and apprehension of what might have to be endured were not without effect upon some, and Barbara perhaps suffered during that time, short as it was, more than others, for she was filled with fears for the safety of the raft and those upon it, among whom was Austin Blyth.

"It'll be all right if the sea keeps calm," she had heard the second mate remark in answer to the anxious inquiries of Mrs. Calthorpe, who had her reasons also for anxiety, to be sure, for the major was on the raft. "I shouldn't much care though to have nothing more substantial under me if the wind takes it into its head to blow hard. I don't fancy from what I saw that it was lashed together very strongly, but there was no time to do more than was done."

Which expression of opinion, coming as it did from so undoubtedly an authority, by no means tended to allay the apprehensions of those of the mate's hearers who had friends upon the raft, and Barbara's heart sank within her at the thought that Austin Blyth's ill-starred passion for her might perhaps cost him his life, and this thought, added to the natural dread of what might befall herself, caused such effects upon her not over-strong frame that she was landed at last in a state of pitiable nervous exhaustion.

She has recovered now, however—the more rapidly that she was not long kept in suspense regarding Austin's fate, the news of his rescue with the others speedily reaching Calcutta; and Captain Fenton, aware from several incoherent sentences of his daughter's dread, though quite unconscious of whom are her thoughts, lost no time in conveying the glad intelligence to her.

Glad, indeed! and in her joy and thankfulness for Austin's safety Barbara had almost forgotten for the time that living or dead he could never more henceforth be aught to her but a stranger.

But that remembrance comes back to her with overwhelming force now. She has left her room this morning, and is sitting out on the verandah, a brown-skinned, bright-eyed ayah squatting on a mat beside her, ready to attend to "missee sahib's" slightest wants, and waiting the return of her father, who drove down to Calcutta two hours ago with the express intention of bringing Miles back to tiffin.

They have not met yet since her return—Miles and she—save at the moment of her landing, though he has been over at the cantonments each day, for the doctor enjoined perfect quiet till her nerves were restored to their usual tone. But she is well enough now, in body, and Miles must no longer be denied his right—for is it not his right as her promised husband?—to see her.

The road from the entrance of the compound in which Captain Fenton's bungalow stands extends in a straight line for more than a mile, and from where she sits reclining in a low cane chair under the broad verandah Barbara, being able to see along it, discerns at last after long watching her father's buggy approaching. Nearer and nearer it comes; now it turns in at the gate, and now, not waiting for rein to be drawn, one of its occupants rises and leaps lightly to the ground and comes towards her.

In another moment Barbara feels a strong arm round her, warm lips pressing hers that are—she shames to know—so cold and unresponsive. She half strives to withdraw herself from the embrace in which she is held, wild words are at her tongue's end, she longs to tell Miles that she is changed, that her heart is no longer his. No longer. Nay, it never has been; she feels that all too keenly now, now when it's too late. But the mad impulse fades, for has she not told herself where her duty lies? Is she not his wife that will be soon? how then can she do other than submit herself to his will?

"My darling," whispers Miles, in low, glad tones, while the ayah grins delightedly at the meeting and retires to a discreet distance. "Mine, my very own, restored to me out of

the jaws of death. Why, how like a drooping lily you look, my Barbara."

"Yes, a great deal too much of the lily there is about her to please me altogether," grumbles Captain Fenton, in a dissatisfied tone. "I did look to see her come back among us with a little more colour in her cheeks than she took away."

Barbara smiles faintly, with such a poor little ghost of a smile, indeed, such an affection of mirth, as makes Miles feel a sudden pang of apprehension when he sees and marks it, as he does, his eyes being fastened on her face.

"You forget," he says, a little tremor in his voice. "You forget how much Barbara has passed through."

"Yes," cries Barbara herself, speaking rapidly and with heightened colour and a forced gaiety of manner. "You surely did not expect, papa, to see me with a face like a milkmaid's after a long sea voyage, ending as it did." And she shudders and pales at the reminiscence. "It is rather unreasonable, I think, when I expected to be complimented on being improved in all other respects, that I should be taken to task just for want of a little colour."

"Dear Barbara," says Miles, who has been forced to release her, but still holds her hands in his firm yet gentle grasp. "You are—well, perhaps not all that I could wish for your own sake, I'd like to see you less pale and sad-looking, but the roses will come back soon, I trust, when you are mine."

Sooner, for as he speaks the crimson overspreads her features, then dies away again, leaving her paler than before; and with a vague foreboding of what he cannot tell Miles suffers her hand to fall from his.

What is it, he wonders, that has changed her so, that makes her manner so altered, so distant?

Barbara, who used to be so frank and unconcerned, so unreserved in her demeanour towards him, now avoids his gaze, has no response in her tone; he feels the difference, though he cannot quite explain where it lies.

No, not though in the conversation which ensues he watches her quite closely and observes her every word with the intent to find a clue. Yet is he sure he is not mistaken.

They have much to speak of, or rather Barbara has so much to tell which they sit and listen to. Her father questions her of Hunsdale and its inhabitants, of old friends whom he never hopes to see more, Miles of her journey, the terrible incident that ended it, and of her fellow-passengers, till she can bear no more, and, seeing she is tired, that she looks fatigued, he at last insists that she shall go to her own room to rest.

"But tiffin is just ready," speculates the captain, whose eyes, not sharpened as Miles's by love, have not noted Barbara's jaded look. "I thought we were all going to have it together."

"I hoped so too," says Miles Kenyon. "But we must not be selfish, sir."

"Selfish!"

"Yes, Barbara does not seem fit for more fatigue just now. Let her rest till the evening. I will come again then."

A smile of grateful thanks rewards him for his consideration, and Barbara departs with her ayah to her own apartments, leaving the two gentlemen to themselves. She is glad to be alone, glad too that the meeting which she had so dreaded is over, and yet—

Ah, it is only for the time, she knows soon, very soon, that Miles will be always with her. There can be no escape, even if she wished it. But she does not—no—no—she has no such thought. Whatever comes she will be true to her word, faithful to him who so well deserves her faithfulness, and—

She has sent the ayah away, and is alone in her own particular room, quite at the other side of the bungalow from that in which her father and Miles Kenyon are together, a room looking out upon a prettily planned little garden with a gate opening on to the road, and on that road there is something which sets Barbara wondering.

A pedestrian figure.

Nothing very surprising, one may say, but rather uncommon in India during the day, when the pedestrian is evidently European. He comes nearer, he stands by the gate, hesitating as if uncertain whether to enter that way or go round to the front, but his hesitation ceases when he lifts his eyes to see, standing framed in the open doorway that faces him, her eyes dilated with—what is it? fear or joy?—her lips parted and trembling, her little hands clasped together on her bosom as though to still its tumultuous beating—Barbara!

At that sight Austin Blyth stays no longer. Uttering an exclamation of delight, he pushes at the gate. It is fast, but what matter for that? Planting both hands on its summit he vaults lightly over, to the dull wonder of the malee who is tending his plants close by, and hurries towards Barbara with extended hands.

"My darling!" he exclaims.

And then steps short, for with a little cry Barbara recoils from his approach, holding up both her hands as though to prevent him from coming nearer.

"His darling!" she repeats to herself, remembering how short a time has elapsed since another has addressed her in the same manner, and, feeling outraged, humiliated by the thought, she gasps out, indignantly:

"Mr. Blyth, how dare you? Why—why have you come here?"

Austin looks at her stunned and bewildered. Remembering what words had last passed between them in that supreme moment when they were parting with no certainty that they might ever meet more in this world, this reception is not what he has looked forward to.

"Why—why have I come here?" he repeats, vaguely.

"Yes," says Barbara. "No, don't come any nearer. You should not have come at all. It is cruel, ungenerous."

"Cruel! ungenerous!" he echoes, still more surprised. "I—I do not understand you. I could not get here sooner. I was only landed late last night, for the tug which picked me up went afterwards to the wreck, and I could not at first tell where to find you, or else—"

"But you should not come here at all," interrupts Barbara.

"Why? What should stay me? Barbara, my love, my own dear one—have I not told you that I love you? Did you not confess that you—"

"Oh, hush, hush!" sobs poor Barbara. "You did not hear me out. I would have told you there—"

"Nay. What more could you have told me that I wanted to hear after your last words to me, Barbara?"

What can she say?

"Go—go at once," she cries, piteously. "You torture me."

Austin can scarce believe his ears.

"Did you not then mean what you said?" he asks, looking steadily, almost sternly at her.

"I—I must not answer you," falters Barbara. "In pity's name, go. Leave me—leave me, I say, at once."

"No, not without some explanation," he answers, fiercely, and then more gently, "Barbara, you know how I have sought you, how patiently I waited till—till the death we have been so mercifully spared looked us both in the face. Then I could keep silence no longer, and you—you acknowledged that you loved me. What have I done? What has since happened to make me forfeit that love?"

"Done? Ah! nothing, nothing," sobs poor Barbara, almost beside herself, torn by conflicting emotions. "And it is not what has happened since but before," she adds, in desperation, "that separates us, that makes me tell you now what I should have said at the time I was mad enough, wicked enough to speak those foolish words: I—I am engaged. I am to be married shortly."

"Married? You?"

"Yes, it is true. He had my promise before I went to England. Would I had died first,

as they said I would do. Now do you understand?"

"Alas! too well. But—"

"No, no," wildly exclaims poor Barbara, putting her hands to her ears as though to shut out the sound of his voice, fearful, perhaps, lest it may tempt her to forget her resolution. "I have told you the truth, Aus—Mr. Blyth. I would have spared you this pain, but I was weak, and the thought that most likely we were both doomed to death made me weaker. You will forget what I said, will you not? And now that you know why it must be so you will go away. And never, never try to see me again."

"But," he insists, "you do love me, Barbara?"

"Oh, hush!" she cries, indignantly. "Am I not sufficiently shamed already? Go, sir, I beg. Hark! I hear someone coming. You must leave me."

Or rather she leaves him, but with a backward glance so full of anguish and despairing love as tells Austin Blyth that, however bitter may be his feelings, Barbara suffers equally with him.

CHAPTER IV.

"I've got some bazaar accounts to go over this afternoon, and must cut away to the office. Confounded nuisance, so hot as it is too. But you needn't run away, you know. Bab will be visible again by-and-bye, I suppose, and meantime, you know where the cheroots are, and if you want a 'peg' to moisten 'em Abdullan will attend to your requirements on that head."

So says Captain Fenton to Miles, who is presently left alone to the enjoyment of a cigar. He has no intention of leaving till the evening.

He has seen so little of Barbara yet, and there is so much for them to talk to each other about. The date must be fixed for their marriage in the first place.

How long will she want to get ready? he wonders. A fortnight ought to be long enough, but then women are not to be hurried in such matters, and he supposes he will have to yield her a little more time than that.

A month, perhaps. She might even stipulate for more than that, but he will not give in to any further delay. Miles is fixed on that point.

He has waited long and patiently enough in all conscience; home is ready for his wife to go to, and—

Ah, his wife! Barbara, dear, sweet little Barbara, with the dusk-brown eyes and hair, and sweet, tender mouth! HIS WIFE.

How the thought thrills him, fills him with joy and thankfulness for the prize he has gained in securing her love. For that she loves him he has no doubt.

What forebodings of evil he felt erewhile had no origin in suspicion of her fidelity. Momentary as they were undefined, all trace of them has vanished from his mind as he lounges back in the cane chair, from which seat Barbara had witnessed his arrival with her father that morning, and, lazily puffing out rings of smoke that the motionless, heat-laden air refuses to disperse, sees pictures there of a happy, blessed future that shall be his soon, very soon, now that Barbara is come back to be his bride.

Dreaming these happy visions his hand falls by his side and comes in contact with something lying on the ground beside his chair; carelessly he lifts it, ignorant that in so doing he seals his own fate.

It is a book, plainly bound in limp leather, and with a yawn Miles is about to place it on the table near him when an idle impulse makes him turn the cover.

The book opens at the first page, and now he sees that its contents are not printed but written, and the handwriting is Barbara's.

"Careless puss," he murmurs, laughingly, and then, no one being by, with a lover's fond foolishness he presses his lips to the pages that contain her characters. "A diary! She can't have any secrets in it, that is certain, or she would be more cautious where she left it."

Only one secret is there, Miles Kenyon, one that will cause more pain to your great heart than any other you could learn.

Put it away, follow your first impulse, put it out of your reach at once.

Barbara is true and pure, and will make you a good wife, in time to come maybe her heart will turn to you; but if you read—

Alas! there is none to warn him. Still, he is of too honourable a nature deliberately to pry into the private diary of even his future wife, but his eyes have fallen upon, his senses taken in before he knows what has happened, a passage which enchains him, which turns his blood to ice and blasts at once and in a moment that vision which but now was before his eyes.

" . . . If my faith wavered Miles shall never know," he reads; and then there comes mention of another whose name is not written.

" Does he think me cold, heartless. . . . Better so, he will the sooner forget me, as I must school myself to do him. . . . I may meet him again—the husband of another, but not one who will love him as I do. . . . had I been free—"

Miles cannot stop now. What is honour or dishonour to him?

He reads on and on, to find confirmation of all that the first page reveals, to find—oh! misery—that the man for whom he was forgotten had not been left behind in England, but was actually in the same vessel with Barbara—HIS, Miles's promised wife—and that though she avoided him hardly an entry in that record of her feelings but betrayed the guard she was compelled to keep over herself lest peradventure she should be tempted beyond her strength.

At last the book falls from Miles Kenyon's hands.

He can read no more—what more can it tell him, indeed, since from it he has learned that she whom he loved and trusted so much is false and fickle, that the future of happiness he has looked forward to must be dreary and desolate.

Better she had died, he thinks, in the first fierce outburst of wrath which seizes him, than have lived to add another to the list of treacherous women.

" Curse her, curse her!" he cries, aloud, in his bitter anguish, for he has no power to reason yet, can perceive nothing but the one stunning, overwhelming fact that Barbara has betrayed him.

That she has struggled against her own feelings, that she has been loyal in deed, however her affection has wavered, goes for nothing at first; but the reaction comes after a time, and he judges her more calmly.

He reads again, this time with set purpose, though the task is torture to him, and gradually his heart softens, his pity is awakened for the poor, weak, gentle girl who, learning too late that she has a heart, has yet been strong enough in all her helplessness to adhere to the promise she gave before that knowledge came to her.

He must see her at once, must learn from her own lips the whole truth—though, alas! what was there to learn more than he already knew?—and then decide what should be done, and with a drawn, haggard face and lagging step he makes his way round the verandah to the other side of the bungalow.

To be stopped at the further corner, round which Barbara's rooms are situated, by the sound of voices.

One, that which he knows and has loved—nay, loves—so well, now low and broken, speaking in tearful, pleading accents; the other deeper, sterner, and reproachful in tone.

No need to tell him, though he has never heard it before, to whom this last belongs. The situation is as plain to him as to the principal actors therein, who are playing their sorrowful parts unconscious of so near an auditor.

And there does Miles remain, unseen, until the close of that brief stolen interview from which Barbara fled, and then steps out and stands, with a set, rigid face, before the man who has supplanted him.

No wonder, he thinks, as he compares his own

rather ungainly figure and massive rather than regular features with Austin Blyth's manly form and frank, honest face.

They are more of an age too, Barbara and this young fellow who, as he knows, has ignorantly ravished him in her affections.

Well, it must be borne, for Miles Kenyon is not the man to take an unwilling bride, or accept duty in lieu of the love which he has believed heretofore was his; but it is hard, very hard, and though his reason tells him that there is no actual blame to either, it is hardly in human nature that he should not feel, as he does, sentiments more nearly approaching hatred than sympathy towards the man who has innocently wronged him.

" Come this way, if you please," he says, shortly and sternly, and retraces his steps.

Austin hesitates. Who is this man, he wonders? Barbara's father? No; he has heard her speak of him as grey-haired.

Who then? For a moment he is inclined to disobey, and then, moved by an impulse for which he cannot well account, follows Miles.

Barbara is sitting in her room, not crying now, tears will not come, but with a blank despair upon her face.

It is all over and done with now, she thinks, that one page in her life's history which might have been so bright is doubled down, the book is closed, and nothing is before her but resignation to the lot she has chosen.

Austin has gone, he will never attempt to see her again, of course. Even if he did it would be useless.

But, oh, the bitterness of it—the intolerable anguish which she feels now that she is assured she is never to look upon his face again! But for that second meeting on the Helicon she might have borne it better, for she had schooled herself to think they had parted them for ever. How is she to bear her life now, she asks herself, how—

There is a tap at the door, which her ayah opens and admits Miles.

" I—I thought you had gone with papa," she stammers, afraid, poor child, lest he must see that she has been weeping and guess the cause, though why he should do so she never stops to think.

" No," and the answer is so sharp and abrupt that she looks at him amazed. " I have been thinking, Barbara."

" Thinking?"

" Yes, and the result of my thoughts is—shall I tell you?"

" What can he mean? Why does he look so grave, so sorrowful?" Barbara asks herself. " There is surely something—what is it?"

" Tell me anything you please, Miles," she says, softly, and he sits down beside her.

Without speaking at first. In fact he cannot just for the moment, but presently he begins.

" Yes, Barbara," he says, suddenly, and with an effort. " I have something to say. There have been a good many changes in the two years that you have been away from us. You are different in yourself. When you left us you were a girl in look as well as years. Now the girl's look is gone, Barbara."

Her eyes are cast down, her fingers nervously interlacing, as she answers, in low, faltering tones:

" I could not keep that always, Miles."

" No," he replies, wearily. " Life is made up of like changes. Our fates alter of course as we grow older, our youthful fancies fade and others take their place. Have you not found it so?"

" I—Miles—I—I do not understand you!"

" Nay," says Miles, a little sarcasm in his tone. " It is not so hard to understand. It is the way of the world, a law of nature that all must obey. I suppose you find some alteration in me, do you not?"

" None, none!" she cries, eagerly. " You seem to me as you always were, all that is kind and good."

" Ah!" and Miles smiles a little sadly. " But one looks for more than kindness and goodness

in one's future husband. What should you think, Barbara, if you found that I was changed towards you?"

" You—to me?"

" If it were so," he continues, " would you be glad or sorry? Tell me, Barbara."

" I—I—" she stammers, but can get no further.

" Barbara," and he rises and stands over her, speaking in low, solemn accents that seem to pierce to her very heart, " speak to me truthfully, candidly and without fear. I shall not be angry. You are my promised wife remember; when the time comes for that promise to be fulfilled, when you put your hand in mine before the altar and utter the vow which once spoken can never be unsaid, will your heart echo that vow, will—"

He stops, for with a low, appealing cry Barbara flings herself upon her knees before him and catches at his hands as she cries aloud:

" Ah! Miles, Miles! Spare me, have pity upon me, for I am very, very unhappy."

" Poor girl! poor Barbara! You will tell me the truth?"

" Yes, yes. I hate, despise myself for being so ungrateful," she sobs. " But it is right you should know. I was so young; I had seen no one else; I did not dream when I gave that promise to you that there was another feeling—a master passion—so different to the sister's love I had given you—till—till it came to me before I was aware, before I knew its power, before I felt incapable of conquering it. Then I was wretched, for I remembered all your goodness to me—"

" Hush! Do not speak of that."

" I must, for it is true, Miles. I was not willingly guilty. I strove to do what was right, and thought I was secure. But now your words make me see the truth. I have done bitter wrong perhaps in giving my love to another, but I can yet atone. Let me keep my word, and—"

He stays her further speech with a quick gesture of command.

" What do you take me for, child?" he asks, hoarsely. " Do you think I am such a wretch as to accept the sacrifice you would make? Ah, no! Come. I know all, and I do not blame you; it is not your fault but mine, all mine, and mine must be the penalty. Come with me."

He speaks in a tone of authority, and Barbara rises, her hand in his, and lets him lead her meekly submissive to the door, which he opens.

" Go in there," he says. " Stay one moment," and he stoops to press a long, lingering kiss upon the fair upturned brow. " It is the last," he whispers, then puts her from him with gentle force, closes the door, and, strong man as he is, drops into the nearest chair.

" Heaven grant me fortitude to bear my lot," he groans, despairingly, " and give my darling—mine no more—all happiness that earth can afford."

OUR COLUMNS FOR THE CURIOUS.

FREANS OF FASHION.—HEAD DRESSES.—On the 12th of July, 1776, Samuel Foote appeared at the Haymarket Theatre in the character of Lady Pentwaze, wearing one of the enormous head-dresses which were then fashionable—not meaning probably anything so serious as the reform of an absurdity, but only to raise a laugh and bring an audience to his playhouse. The dress is stated to have been stuck full of feathers of an extravagant size; it extended a yard wide, and the whole fabric of feathers, hair and wool dropped off his head as he left the stage. King George and Queen Charlotte, who were present, laughed heartily at the exhibition, and her majesty, wearing an elegant and becoming head-dress, supplied a very fitting rebuke to the absurdity which the actor had thus satirised. There are numerous representations to be met

with in books of fashion and descriptions in books of various kinds of the head-dress of that period. Sometimes it was remarkable simply for its enormous height, lofty pad or cushion being placed on the top of the head, and the hair combed up over it and slightly confined in some way at the top. Frequently, however, this tower was bedizened in a most extravagant manner, necessarily causing it to be broad as well as high, and rendering the whole fabric a mass of absurdity. It was a mountain of wool, hair, powder, lawn, muslin, net, lace, gauze, ribbon, flowers, feathers and wire. Sometimes these materials were built up, tier after tier, like the successive stages of a pagoda.

ROWLAND HILL.—The anecdotes related by Rowland Hill and his philpot discourses are numerous and piquant. On one occasion he was preaching for a public charity when a note was handed up to him inquiring if it would be right for a bankrupt to contribute. He noticed the matter in the course of his sermon, and pronounced decidedly that such a person could not do so in honesty. "But, my friends," he added, "I would advise you who are not insolvent not to pass the plate this evening, as the people will be sure to say, 'There goes the bankrupt!'" Another time, preaching at Wapping, he declared he was addressing great, notorious—yes, WAPPING sinners! And one day, on announcing from the pulpit the amount of the liberal collection, he remarked, "You have behaved so well on this occasion that we mean to have another collection next Sunday. I have heard it said of a good cow that the more you milk her the more she will give." One wet day he observed a number of persons enter his chapel to take shelter from a heavy shower of rain and remarked, pitifully, that many people were blamed for making religion a cloak, but that he did not think those were much better who made it an UMBRELLA!

TAMING THE SHAWW.—"Madame," said Dr. Johnson, in a conversation with Mrs. Knowles, "we have different modes of restraining evil—stocks for the men, a ducking-stool for women, and a pound for beasts." One of the last instances of the ducking-stool is in the "London Evening Post," of April 27, 1743. "Last week," says that journal, "a woman that keeps the Queen's Head alehouse at Kingston, in Surrey, was ordered by the court to be ducked for scolding, and was accordingly placed in the chair and ducked in the river Thames; under Kingston bridge, in the presence of 2,000 or 3,000 people. According to tradition this punishment was inflicted at Kingston and other places till the beginning of the present century. However the stool was but rarely used at this period, though it was extensively employed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Mr. Cole, the antiquary, writing about 1780, says, "When I was a boy and lived with my grandfather in the great corner house next to Magdalen College, Cambridge, I remember to have seen a woman ducked for scolding. The chair hung by a pulley fastened to a beam about the middle of the bridge, and the woman having been fastened in the chair she was let under water three times successively, and then taken out. The bridge was then of timber, before the present stone bridge of one arch was built. The ducking-stool was constantly hanging in its place, and on the back panel of it was an engraving representing devils laying hold of scolds. Some time after a new chair was erected having the same device carved on it, and well painted and ornamented. The ducking-stool is so old indeed that it is mentioned in the 'Domesday,' Surrey, in the account of the city of Chester.

THE SCOLD'S BRIDLE.—Old Dr. Plot, in his "History of Staffordshire," states that "they have an artifice at Newcastle-under-Lyne and Walsall for correcting scolds, which it does so effectually that I look upon it as much to be preferred to the ducking-stool . . . it being such a bridle for the tongue as not only quite deprives them of speech but brings shame for the transgressions and humility thereupon before 'tis taken off, which being put upon the offender by order of the magistrate, and fastened

with a padlock behind, she is led round the town by an officer, to her shame, nor is it taken off till after the party begins to show all external signs imaginable of humiliation and amendment." The doctor gives a representation of a pair of these "branks," as seen in various towns of Staffordshire about the year 1680. . . . There are still numerous specimens of "branks" preserved in different private and public antiquarian collections throughout England. There was until lately a brank in the old Chesterfield Poor-house, Derbyshire; one at the Lichfield Guildhall; one at the Hunsdon Hall, Staffordshire; one at Walsall, near Wolverhampton; one at Macclesfield, still to be seen in the town hall. Pennant in his "Tour in Scotland," in 1772, records its use at Langholm in Dumfriesshire, where the local magistrates had it appears their little piece of machinery in constant readiness for any emergency.

FLOWERS.—Our ancestors connected certain flowers with certain saints on account of their blossoming about the saint's days. Thus the snowdrop was called the Purification Flower, from its blossoming about Candlemas (February 2); the crocus was dedicated to St. Valentine; the daisy to St. Margaret (hence called by the French "La Belle Marguerite"); the Lady Smock to the Virgin, its flowers appearing about Lady Day; St. John's Wort was connected with the blessed St. John; and there were the daffodil or Lent lily, the Plague flower or amomum, the Herb Christopher, St. Barnaby's thistle, Canterbury bell, Herb St. Robert, and Mary Wort.

THE CASTLE OF MARKSBURG.—Braubach, a small town on the Rhine, between Coblenz and Mayence, with a chateau at the water-side, stands at the foot of a high and almost conical rock, surmounted by the imposing Castle of Marksburg, an unshattered specimen of a stronghold of the middle ages, and on this account deserving of a visit. It is indeed the beautiful ideal of the old Ritter-schloss, with mysterious narrow passages, winding stairs, vaults hewn in the living rock, which served in former days as dungeons; among them the horrible pit called "Hundloch" (dog-hole), into which prisoners were let down, as a bucket into a well by a windlass, and above all a Chamber of Torture, whence the rack has only lately been removed. Here is shown the cell where the emperor, Henry the Fourth, was confined. A secret passage is said to pass down through the rock to a tower on the borders of the river. The view from the top of the donjon keep will please the lover of the picturesque. Braubach is about seven miles from Ems. . . . A little higher up than the village of Kamp, immediately above the ancient Convent of Bornhofen, and opposite Salsis, rise the mouldering towers of the twin castles of Sternberg and Liebenstein, crowning the double summit of a lofty rock covered with vines. They go by the name of "The Brothers," and are interesting for their picturesqueness and the tale of their owners, two brothers, who having fallen in love with the same fair maid became foes; settled their rivalry by the sword and fell by each other's hands. The castles belonged to the electors of Treves.

ROBBER CASTLES.—Close above the town of St. Goar rises the vast fortress of Rheinfels, the most extensive ruin on the Rhine. The original castle was built by a Count Diether of Kalzenbogen in 1245, as a stronghold where he could reside and also exact toll, or as we should say at present levy transit duties upon all merchandise passing up or down the Rhine. An attempt however on his part to increase these duties roused the indignation of his neighbours and his castle was besieged in vain for fifteen months by the burghers of the adjacent towns. This unsuccessful attempt was productive of more important consequences. It was one of the circumstances which gave rise to the extensive confederacy of the German and Rhenish cities to the number of sixty, whose more numerous and formidable armies reduced and dismantled not only the castles of Rheinfels but also most of the other strongholds or robber-nests upon the Rhine. This event took place in the latter part of the 13th century. It was

besieged in 1692 by an army of 24,000 French, under Marshal Tallard, who had promised the fortress as a new year's gift to Louis XIV. of France; but through the brave defence of the Hessian general, Gortz, was compelled to break his word and draw off his forces. His example was not followed in 1794, when, though its works had been greatly strengthened, it was basely abandoned by the Hessian garrison without firing a shot on the first appearance of the French revolutionary army, by whom it was blown up and rendered useless.

CHRISTMAS BILLS.—Hone has printed an admirable parody on "Those Evening Bells." It bears the date of 1826, but it may with equal propriety be assigned to the current year.

A COMMERCIAL MELODY.

Those Christmas bills, those Christmas bills,
How many a thought their number kills!
Of notes and cash, and that sweet time
When off I heard my sovereigns chime!
Those golden days are passed away,
And many a bill I used to pay
Sticks on the file, and empty tills
Contain no cash for Christmas bills.
And so 'twill be—though these are paid
More Christmas bills will still be made,
And other men will fear these ills,
And curse the name of Christmas bills!

THAT FANT.—"Anything new or fresh this morning?" a reporter asked in a railway office. "Yes," replied the lone occupant of the apartment. "What is it?" asked the reporter, eagerly whipping out his note-book. "That print you are leaning against." That railway man is now in the hospital, and that reporter is in gaol.

NEWSPAPERS.—A Maine man who said "he didn't care two shaks of a lamb's tail about the newspapers," rode fourteen miles through a fierce snowstorm to get a copy of a weekly that spoke of him as a "prominent citizen!"

The inhabitants of the New Hebrides have consigned to London 3,700lb. weight of arrow-root, by way of payment for an edition of the New Testament in their language!

The cost of the Temple Bar memorial was £10,690 6s. 5d. Of this £3,260 is payable to Messrs. Mowlem and Co. for the foundations, scaffolding, granite work, masonry, carving, and modelling; £2,152 to Mr. Boehm, R.A., for the statues in marble of the Queen and the Prince of Wales; £1,081 to Mr. Birch, A.R.A., for the "Griffin" in bronze; and £1,603 15s. for the basso reliefs.

The simplest post-office in the world is in Magellan Straits, and has been established there for some years past. It consists of a small cask, which is chained to the rock of the extreme cape in the straits, opposite Terra del Fuego. Each passing ship sends a boat to open the cask and to take letters out and place others into it. The post-office is self-acting, therefore; it is under the protection of the navies of all-nations, and up to the present there is not one case to report in which any abuse of the privileges it affords has taken place.

The foreign habitués of Monte Carlo are disgusted with the conduct of an Englishman. He won 220,000 francs, and was still cool—so cool that he languidly said to the applauding crowd: "I must make it 250,000, a round English sum of £10,000, you know, for £8,750 is a mere matter of detail." After taking breath, he returned to the table, and, amidst intense interest, he flung down another 5,000 francs. He lost! The crowd expected to see him fling down another 5,000 francs. He folded up his remaining notes, and, with a long gape, exclaimed: "£8,500! that will do," put the notes into his breast pocket, and did not play any more—in fact, left the place the next day. "Disgusting levity," exclaims the crowd.



[SPEAKING HER MIND.]

"LA CONTESSA."

I WAS driving on the Long' Arno, in Florence, with my pretty cousin, Dora. She was a beauty and an heiress, and, what is better, the nicest girl in the world. When we were children a marriage had been arranged by our respective parents between us.

But Dora had recently fallen in love with an old college chum of mine, now the Rev. Arthur Beaumont, whom we had met in Paris and who had followed us to Italy; and I was doing all I could to help.

We had to conceal our plans as yet, however, from Dora's mother. Just now Aunt Dodd had gone off to Venice with Lady Anthorpe, an acquaintance, leaving her daughter in charge of Mrs. Livingston, a common friend.

We had turned into the Vigna Nuova when Dora cried, suddenly:

"Look there!"

Against a cracked old wall, where two yellow butterflies fluttered in the late spring sunshine, leaned the most pathetic figure I had ever seen.

Slender with youth, and perhaps with want, her beautiful, dark, deep eyes raised in dumb solicitation, while her thin hand held out a bunch of pale, early tulips, she stood, a basket of similar blossoms at her feet, guarded by a poor, half-fed dog, whose hanging head and thin

flanks repeated the hopeless depression of the girl's face.

A crowd of persons went by indifferent and without purchasing. Touched by her wearied look of despair, even more than by Dora's evident sympathy, I tossed a bit of paper money to her, which fluttered and fell into the dirt of the street.

She started forward to pick it up, glancing up at us with a look of thanks. The look, alas! cost her dear, for at that instant a hand-cart, which had escaped from its owners, came rushing down the slope from the Ponte Carraja on a run, and knocked her senseless.

I sprang out of the carriage without waiting for the door to be opened, though Antonio, my servant, was on the box with the coachman. Dora called in eager pity, leaning out of the window, to bring the poor girl into the carriage.

Antonio's inquiries soon resulted in directing us to a small florist's shop, in the Via San Jacopo, as the poor flower-girl's home, and we drove there instantly.

She was, however, still unconscious when we reached the small, open room, which constituted the flower shop.

"Oh, Dick, she is so light and thin!" said Dora, pitifully. "And she looks half-starved."

We were immediately the centre of a sympathetic crowd in the dark, narrow street.

"It is the beautiful little countess!" cried one.

"It is she, Poverina!"

"What a pity, poor angel!"

What could they mean? But directly a woman came rushing out.

"Here, Tonio," I cry, impatiently, "help to lift her out and have a bed prepared and a doctor."

But the woman answered:

"There is no one, signore mio, no one to take care of her, and the bed has been sold. She must go to the hospital, I fear, for her father is sick and delirious. He must go there in a day or so, and it is better that the contessina should go now and have the hospital doctor."

"Are there no furnished rooms in your house to let?" I asked. "Yes, the placard at the door says there are. Let a bed be prepared in the best one, and the flower-girl be placed in it."

"If the signorino pleases," whispered Antonio, "he will do better not to enter. And the young lady too would be wise not to get down," he added, as Dora was about to leave the carriage. "Ah! yes," to an impatient gesture of mine. "But I do now know all about it. They are so poor, so very poor, and the old duca would die rather than have a stranger see his humiliation. When we return to the hotel I will tell all."

"Very well," said Dora, making a gesture for me not to speak. "We will postpone further words till then."

"Alas," said Antonio, "alas, O Holy Virgin!" with outstretched palms, "that a daughter of the duca with quarterings countless should be driven to sell flowers from a street corner." And there were actually tears in his voice.

"Understand, Tonio," repeated my cousin, "the girl and her father are to want for nothing. I shall come to-morrow to see for myself if you have done your best."

With that we drove off. Later in the day Antonio told his story.

"It is the Duke Alva Verona, the last direct heir of one of the grandest titles in Italy. Orestes, his old valet, long ago told me all about it. Alas, carino mio, Orestes had helped support the duca and his daughter, having a place in the telegraph office, and serving his old master at odd times. But he lost the place two days ago by reason of the necessity for municipal economies, since the king has gone to Rome, leaving the city so in debt.

"His bitterest grief was to have to go to their little podere in the Romagna, leaving the duca ill, and his young mistress, whom he had held in his arms as a baby, to the horrors of poverty. But bread is dear, with twenty-two taxes upon wheat between the earth and the mouth, and Orestes had to go with his own two or starve also.

"Ah! how did the duca get so poor? His mother quarrelled with him because he would not marry to please her, but chose a beautiful girl instead who had no money, a thing she never forgave. In a year she died, leaving all her own property, and it was very great, to her daughter, who left it in her turn to her husband, a Frenchman.

"But the duke's lands, you say? If the signorino pleases he sold off most of them last year, and used part of the money to improve his ancestral castle; the rest he spent in property he had on the Tiber, near Rome, thinking the location was good for villa sites. But when once ill-luck gets hold of one it pursues, as the signorino knows, till death releases.

"In the inundation of seventy-two all the duca's banks, walls, trees and houses were swept away, and since then only the Holy Mother knows how he has lived."

The rest of the story may be told more concisely. A son of the old duke had gone away some years before to South America to try for a living, and they had given him all that could be spared for his outfit. The cruel anxiety of his continued silence had worn upon his father, and their illness was added to their other woes.

The daughter, only seventeen years of age and very slender, had found herself alone with her sick father, and at last, being without means, had accepted the florista's offer of employment in selling flowers.

As she had been kept indoors during these last cruel years of her life, having had neither dress nor a servant to follow her as her rank demanded, the flower-woman was sure she would never be recognised, and hoped for a plentiful sale of flowers at her beautiful, child-like hands, to sympathetic forestieri.

Needless to say that Tonio, instructed by me and supplied for form's sake with funds by my Cousin Dora, proved a ministering angel. Nurse, service, luxuries, all made a magic appearance, and the poor of the neighbourhood, in their sympathetic admiration for my cousin and me, became so demonstrative that our visits had to be made at secret and untimely hours.

Stella, for that I found was the name of the daughter, had been carefully educated by her father, and even spoke English tolerably, though with a droll but to me most charming accent.

When the old duke got better, as he soon did, he seemed to take all for granted, for he asked no questions of his daughter—the weakness following upon fever creating in him a strange sort of mental as well as physical languor. He had no knowledge of our previous visits to his child, and though Stella and Dora adored each other, the question of a future seemed never to trouble the gentle Italian girl.

"My brother will return, and these kind signore will let him love them as I do," said she.

The days to me were winged. The little back room in Via San Jacopo, full of flowers and sunshine, often held four very happy people, and means were found too for long drives in the country after awhile. Ah! those sweet spring days.

But our lotos-eating was to be ended in an equally unexpected and cruel manner, and before the complete recovery of the duke had warranted me in asking him for his daughter.

On the day that her old father was to make his first feeble promenade about the rooms for a change of scene, as the doctor had ordered, Dora and I went away to St. Marc's to marvel once more over the subtle charm in those heavenly faces of Fra Angelico, and Arthur Beaumont, "quite accidentally," of course, arrived on similar thoughts intent.

As we strolled back to the Arno it seemed to me that I recognised the back of Aunt Dodd's bonnet in a hack going over the Trinita bridge, but Dora said:

"It couldn't be; there was nothing in mother's last letter about returning."

We got ices and agreeable indigestives at Giacosa's. Then I ventured to suggest a desire to know how the old duke had borne his first walk.

"You might go and inquire of the flower-woman, I should think," said Dora, with a shy smile.

"I will see your cousin to the hotel," said Beaumont, unable to conceal his joy at a prospective tête-à-tête.

I went laughing down the shady side of the river, and, throwing away my cigar, turned into the familiar vicolo. No one was in the florist's little shop. But hearing a noise of loud talking above stairs, and a voice I thought not unfamiliar, I made my way at once toward the well-known rooms.

Yes, there was no mistaking the excited tones of my Aunt Dodd. What could she be doing here?

I pushed on through a half-open door. There she stood, her face crimson, her hat awry upon her silver curls, and her red umbrella raised in a threatening manner.

The old duke, whose wild, frightened eyes and white, unkempt hair made him a picture of illness, feebleness and suffering, that should have been his protection, sat cowering in his chair, holding fast to his daughter's shaking hand. She, my beautiful Stella, with her sweet face blanched to a deadly whiteness, did not flinch, but faced her angry enemy with a scornful gaze, her slender form at its tallest, and her eyes alight with the fire of wounded dignity.

But who was this other and new factor in the sum, a man who stood by, his arms folded and

an insolent smile on his mouth, gazing from one to the other, but speaking no word?

"I tell you he will never marry you," said my aunt, in her sharpest tones, "and you can have but one object in enticing him to your house secretly, and that is to get his money—"

"Aunt Dodd," I interrupted.

But she cut me short. She had turned and recognised me.

"No, I won't," she cried. "That trollope standing there with her grand air, has bewitched you. I've no doubt she's as bad as she can be, my poor boy, and you knowing nothing of such wretches. But how could you have brought Dora here, your promised wife? What company for her!"

I took my aunt gently by the shoulders and put her out of the room and closed the door on her.

"You see," says the stranger, in his turn, in good English, addressing the contessina and turning his back upon me when I returned, "you see it is as I said; and you have in your ignorance of the world forfeited your good name and also compromised your ancient family."

Stella's eyes met mine in a horror-stricken, comprehending glance. Then she wavered back and forth, clutched at the air and fell fainting, her head on her father's knees. The old duke burst into feeble sobs and cries.

The nurse at this rushes forward from the further room, and the new-comer asks me with cool politeness if I do not find it in good taste to retire. I answer hastily that I must first know that the contessina is recovered.

He stands before me so that without violence I cannot reach my darling and politely proposes that I shall await the tidings of her recovery in the shop below.

"The vivacious truthfulness of your honest but mistaken relative has disturbed my cousin," he frigidly explains, "but it will pass."

At this I follow my aunt downstairs.

"Oh, Dicky, how could you be so vile?" she cries. "I was so horrid angry when Miss Jenkinson wrote me all about it. She said, you know, the girl was—well—at least—"

"Go away home, this minute," I cried, savagely.

And she obeyed, speechless, frightened for the first time in her life.

I await news of Stella's recovered senses in a dazed silence. One thing only is certain, that she will never wish to see me again. And this cousin, who is he, and where was he in those darkest days? He is handsome, too, after a sort; and young enough.

He comes to interrupt my sad thoughts with polite nothings.

"La contessina finds herself better," he assures me. "She sends her thanks for my material kindness. At an early day I shall be paid in coin of the realm for all I have done."

He presents me with his card, and I return mine. He then stands, hat in hand, and his heels together like a dancing-master, evidently, though politely, waiting for me to take myself off.

Is this to be the end of my dream? I cannot let it go thus. I make another effort.

"Might I not be permitted," I ask, "to bring my explanations to the contessina and her father? To-morrow, perhaps."

"The signor will kindly pardon us," urged the cousin—the Marchese Corti-Biancelli, as his card explained—"if the brusquerie of his amiable relative, and her misconception of the contessina's charming goodness, should make it advisable to deprive the Dal Verona family of the pleasure of his further acquaintance—other," he added, with another polite bow, "than through the solicitors of each." I, being a man of the world, he averred, would at once see and welcome such an advisable step for all parties. If I permitted, he would, therefore, bid me a regretful adieu.

But after he had wheeled on his heel, he returned to inform me of a fact, unimportant it was true, to me—at least, he said so—but he had accepted the written proposals of the still absent count, Stella's brother, and would, therefore, hasten to prepare all for that gentleman's

approaching arrival from South America, so that his, the marchese's marriage with Stella, could follow immediately after the arrival of her brother with her portion.

He naively added, as between men, that he had no doubt of Count Dal Verona's intention really to furnish his sister with a portion, as that gentleman had already sent a large sum home to reinstate his father; but he should wisely wait to see the money first.

I was so silent under this novel confidence that he bade me an airy adieu, and went off up the stairs, caressing his waxed moustache, while I was still in the shop.

"Signorino mio," whispered the florist, hoarsely, the moment we were alone, "don't be so cast down. It is natural that she should marry the marchese; but you shall see her, if you and she wish, and let her tell it to you with her own sweet mouth. You were an angel to her, and so was your young lady, whom the Virgin bless."

I went away in silence.

Dora came to me when I got home, and I told her all.

"I won't have it so," she said. "Mamma must have been awful to poor Stella, for she had been told horrid things."

"Stella won't give me a second thought after such an insult. Besides, fortune has come back to her, and a husband chosen for her after the custom of her class."

"I wouldn't give you a second thought either, if I were she, and knew you to be so faint-hearted," said Dora, with spirit.

"Shall I get into armour and charge down upon the marchese, lance in rest? Ah, Dora, if I but dreamed she loved me, I'd carry her off from their midst, by main force, if necessary."

"Good," cried Dora. "Now you show pluck. At any rate, I would try to see her, and find out."

"But how am I to see her? They are to move to-day, the florists tell me, to one of their old palaces, repurchased by the son's money, and Stella's duenna is of the strictest—"

Dora shook her head, despondingly.

"At all events, you must keep watch of her, and be ready for anything," she said.

Beaumont now arrived, ostensibly to call on me, but I, obligingly, took a book, and an armchair in the window, and turned my back. I was aroused from my sad reflections by the entry of Aunt Dodd, just as Beaumont had taken Dora's hand and kissed her. The mother comprehended the scene at a glance. There the culprit stood, looking very idiotic. Aunt Dodd was a picture of terror and dismay.

"Dora! Mr. Beaumont!" she cried, tragically. "Do my eyes deceive me?"

"No, they don't, in the least, and it's quite right that you should know all about it," answered Dora, courageously, though she looked frightened enough; and she came forward, holding Arthur's hand.

"It will kill me—my own child deceiving me," murmured the old lady, with real feeling.

"Now, dear mamma," said Dora, going up to her and kissing her, "listen to reason. Dick has given us such a nice villa and vineyard, and Arthur is such a dear—"

I came to the rescue with certain other suggestions of a mercenary kind, and Aunt Dodd finally consented to hear Dora's expostulations.

While she was still gasping and hysterical Beaumont leant over and kissed her hand with many protestations of his devotion.

"Oh, Dicky!" sighed my aunt, looking dolefully at me, "and I have loved you as my son so long. I thought you were to marry her."

I signified that she was at perfect liberty to go on in the same line for an unlimited length of time, as it might amuse her and did not bore me in the least, but that I could not marry Dora.

"How hard-hearted you have grown," she said, turning away from me, "since you knew that cruel Italian girl, who threw you over for her rich cousin. After all, Dora, I believe you are the only one that is true."

A few days after Beaumont said to me: "I saw Stella to-day; she looked sad and forsaken as you could wish, though her carriage and liveries were splendid."

Was Stella indeed sad? I had been quiet so far in my wretchedness, because I believed her happy. What should I do if she too suffered? Was she being coerced into an unwelcome marriage?

I had come in a morning or two after from a long gallop over the hills when Dora appeared, a peculiar expression on her face.

"The florista, in Via San Jacopo, is ill," she said, "and I want you to go with me there. The street is so dark and poor you know."

She led the way to my surprise to the well-known, well-remembered vicolo at the back of the house instead of going in by the main street.

On entering my surprise was at an end. By a bed in which lay the florista sat the confessing more beautiful though if possible paler than ever.

Dora went behind her and put an arm about her sweet neck without speaking. Stella lifted to Dora's and then to mine her great, candid eyes like those of a fearless child.

"Signorino Ricardo," she said, slowly, "this dearest girl has told me of her happiness; and she has told me that you are—are not—not to be her husband as I thought—as your terrible relative asserted."

At these last words she put her pretty hands up to conceal the bright colour which mounted to her cheeks as she remembered Aunt Dodd's cruel diatribe.

Could it be? Was Dora nodding her head affirmatively to me there behind Stella?

I forgot everything—her father—her proposed marriage—all. I knelt beside her with wild, wild words.

"Stella, my beautiful," I cried, "I shall never marry if I may not have you for my wife. I cannot endure life if you must belong to another. Have you not seen—if you do not know that I loved you ever since the first moment I saw you?"

"Is it then so?" she said, with soft straightforwardness. "I will be your wife—yours only—if you do indeed love me. Dora was sure of it. But then I had been so cruelly convinced of the contrary."

"Poor mamma, she will be so penitent," said Dora, "and you will forgive her, carina, for my sake?"

"She is the mother of my dearest Dora, and near to—to—"

She put her soft, little hand in mine with such an adorable blush that I devoured it with kisses.

"Poor I!" sighed the forgotten florista, whose illness was an evident fraud, concocted between her and my cousin.

She jumped up bristling as she spoke, laughing with Dora over the success of their stratagem.

"And your father," I said to Stella, "he will not oppose?"

"Ah, he has known what it is to love, and has bravely paid the price; I think he will not oppose."

And she buried her conscious face on my shoulder.

"And your brother?"

"My brother? I must be content to displease him if he wills. The marchese, my cousin, will act as a man of the world, however," and she laughed slyly.

Dora returned to the Dal Verona palace with Stella, and instantly commenced a war of extermination against the duenna, who was in favour of the marchese.

By the next day the two girls had coaxed the old duke into receiving me, and as I could dispense with a portion, and even make ample settlements upon my wife, I soon distanced the cousin, even in the opinion of Stella's brother, whom I found a most excellent fellow when he returned.

The day the contract was signed my Aunt Dodd appeared magnificent in satin and lace,

and quite ignoring her first interview with my bride.

"You are the sweetest as well as the loveliest of dears," she said to Stella.

My love and I, out of the plenitude of our happiness, could afford to condone the cruelty of my aunt's conduct on that memorable occasion when she and Stella first met, and I ventured upon some deprecating generalism to the poor, jilted marchese, after the formalities of the occasion were over.

"But, caro mio," he answered, enthusiastically, "you have unwittingly done me the greatest service. It is not yet known, but I am in a treaty for the hand of the daughter of the potter at Frascati, and she will have six times the dot of my cousin Stella, and probably more."

The days of jealous suitors, rivals, and love-in-a-cottage seemed so very obsolete that we four call ourselves the old-fashioned lovers; and in her happier name of wife and mother la confessing has quite forgotten her title and prefers to be called only by that—to me—dear name, "STELLA."

NOBLE AT LAST;

or,

THE HEADSMAN OF ROUEN.

(AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.)

CHAPTER X.

THE SAVING CLAUSE.

A TREMENDOUS revolution has taken place in the thoughts and feelings of Gaston Gaultier, as he reeled rather than rushed out of the presence of her whom he would now have died to save, had he possessed a thousand lives to sacrifice for her sake.

But the jailer was waiting in the stone passage just outside the door, eyeing him with reprobation and suspicion, and he mechanically closed the entrance, shot the noiseless bolts, and returned the key to him.

His will had proved weaker, or his love stronger, than he had expected.

Pity had closed the portals upon ambition, pride, the haunting aspirations of long years, and love—even love that he felt to be hopeless and despised—had usurped their place in heart and soul.

For a moment he was almost desperate. He lurked behind the key-bearer in the passage leading out, and meditated springing upon him, strangling him in his clutch, and then rushing back with the boon, not of death but of freedom, in his hands, to that adored and guiltless one whom he had left with scorn and loathing for despair's companions.

But no, the mad thought was no sooner conceived than abandoned. The masonry of those hideous walls was tomb-like in its dampness, fortress-like in its security. Besides, he could see the steel caps of the men-at-arms glistening in the torch-light of the vaulted ante-rooms between the end of the corridor and the outer gates.

Groaning in his inmost soul he concealed his agitation beneath his heavy cloak and huge sombrero, gained the open air, and sped along the streets like one pursued.

Perhaps he was pursued, or at least stealthily watched and followed, but his faculties were shut to every other thought, sensation, idea, but those attendant on his changed and horror-stricken mood.

He gained his house and study. The awful alteration in his face and mien were quickly marked by Judith, who had kept her promise of waiting for his return, as soon as he stood revealed before her eyes—wild-eyed, spectral-white, and trembling like a leaf—but she viewed the change with a sort of satisfaction, as though she had anticipated it.

"So, Gaston Gaultier, you have no longer need to ask the meaning of my late strange words," said she, as he dashed aside his hat and cloak and sank into a chair. "Unhappy man! I knew your weakness as I knew your strength. Vain was your iron purpose, vain ambitions self, when love with softer pleading found a voice within your heart of heart."

"Love?" repeated her master, looking at her still wildly, but struggling to regain his self-command. "You knew my secret, Judith?"

"Ay, and have conjectured it this many a day. That habit of thinking aloud which you indulge, sir, is not good for secret-holding. Then I have marked your cheek's dark flush, your bosom's heave, the sparkle of your eyes whenever, in the hermit's guise, you have returned from interviews with her. And then of late you rave and murmur in your sleep; and I have ears."

"What then?" cried Gaultier, impatiently. "Am I the less unhappy? Oh! you speak the truth. Ambition's grave is dug; and hope's entombed; love, only love survives, to rend, to torture, and to mock the world!"

"Not if you will it otherwise perchance."

"Away! you do but mock me!" cried Gaultier, with horrible bitterness. "Am I not the Executioner? Must I not kill—slay—ay, even where I love so madly, hopelessly?"

"Not if the prisoner herself would live upon conditions you yourself may fix."

"Good dame, you're more distraught than I. The prison's triple-walled, hedged round by men-at-arms!"

"Ay, it is secure."

"What mean you then?"

"The prisoner is a woman, young, unmarried, beautiful, high-born."

"And doomed—irrevocably doomed!" cried Gaultier, hoarsely. "To-morrow's dawn will see her at the block, and this, this headsmen's arm of mine—Ha! 'tis at the stroke of midnight now. How sweeps the wing of time when fledged by horror and despair! The hours are but minutes! Oh!"

"Sink not before imagined fears, my kind, good master!" exclaimed old Judith, with a joyous kindling of her faded eyes. "There is an alternative to death, will Mademoiselle de Montfort but accept it?"

"You rave."

"Read what is here upon the statute book," said Judith, opening a bulky tome upon the table, and thrusting it under his eyes.

"Sdeath! I know by heart the clause concerning me, my office and reward."

"Not so; but only so far as your ambitious selfishness has prompted you to read. Read on, I say!"

Her voice was imperative, but at the same time there was something so strangely hopeful in it that he obeyed her mechanically.

"You have a wayward-mood, good dame, but I obey. Listen," and he read aloud: "Furthermore, it is solemnly agreed that whatever Public Executioner shall strike off, each with a single blow, the heads of nine noble persons shall then himself be vested with such patent of nobility as by the law shall be proclaimed, and thenceforth rank among the ancient nobles of the land."

"So that finishes the page, dame. What would you more?"

"Read on, I say!" cried Judith, impatiently. "Wrapped in your selfishness, which ever called for newer heads and fresher blood to meet its fell requirements, the saving clause upon the opposite page has heretofore escaped your study. Read on!"

He turned his eyes to the opposite page and began to read again, but his thought outran his utterance, and the words faltered in his throat.

Judith bent over his shoulder and read out the clause in a loud, shrill voice: "And it is furthermore decreed that, should an unmarried female be condemned to death, the Public Executioner may save her life and do away with all punishment in her case whatsoever to which she hath been appointed, by marrying her before the hour of her doom hath sounded."

Gaston Gaultier bounded to his feet with a great, ringing cry, and snatched his cloak and hat once more.

"Purblind, impotent fool that I have been!" he exclaimed. "Her scorn may yet reign paramount above the fear of death itself, but I will make the test."

He tore out of the book the two leaves containing the clauses, thrust them in his breast, and was rushing out, when the dame caught him by the arm.

"Stay!" she cried, with joyous sarcasm; "you surely would not trample on your ambition?"

"A thousand times, at love's behest! Away!" he shouted, casting off her hand, but far from angrily.

"But think! Your patent of nobility—the Barony of Pierrefonds?"

A loud, scornful laugh was Gaultier's only response, as he darted down the stairs and out of the house.

On and on he sped toward the prison gate, but before he could reach it he heard the roar of angry voices, mingled with the clash of arms, and now and then the sharp reports of arquebuses. Then, as he came in sight of the castle, he saw its gates beset by struggling men, over whose swaying and contentious forms the fitful gleam of torches rose and fell.

"What! Has the madcap viscount summoned his adherents of Malmaison to such a daring and foolhardy enterprise?" he muttered, hastening forward. "'Tis madness!"

But at this moment a dastard blow from behind, accompanied by a fierce threat, caused him to face about. The stealthy footsteps that had haunted his steps more than once before had now closed boldly and substantially around him, and he was surrounded by five or six steel-capped, breast-plated retainers, with the green and yellow favour of the Malmaison fluttering from their morions, and their drawn swords leveled at his breast.

"It is the headsman! Upon him—hew him down!" cried their leader, beginning the unequal assault with a furious thrust.

"'Tis well!" muttered Gaston, with perfect composure, but at the same time drawing his sword and parrying the thrust with wonderful address. "I'm for you all, and welcome."

(To be Continued.)

STATISTICS.

GREAT INCREASE IN SHEFFIELD TRADE.—The total exports from Sheffield to the United States in 1879 amounted to £671,723, whereas the exports for the past year reached no less than £1,075,243, being an increase of £403,519 on the previous year. The increase in steel exports is very large. In 1879 steel to the amount of £220,509 was sent to America; but during the past twelve months the value of steel exports from Sheffield increased by more than £120,000, the total amount sent being £398,263. In cutlery there has also been a very satisfactory improvement. During 1879 the cutlery exports only reached £178,042, whereas in 1880 they have increased to £255,855. During the past quarter both the steel and cutlery demand from the States has been steadily growing. The exports of steel in the past three months to America reached £101,162, compared with £86,788 in the corresponding quarter of last year. A similar improvement has also taken place in the cutlery demand. No less than £71,082 worth of cutlery has been sent to the States during the last quarter of 1880; whereas the value of the cutlery exports in the last quarter of 1879 was only £58,332. During the prosperous period of 1874 when Sheffield trade with America was so brisk the total exports reached £1,393,162, and the exports for 1880 amount to more than £1,000,000, a most encouraging fact when it is considered that in 1878 the total exports from Sheffield to America did not reach £600,000.

THE meteorologists have been making up the weather accounts for 1880. It seems that in London, though we had less rain last year than in 1878 or 1879, which were very wet years indeed, we have only three times had so much rain in the last 20 years. The temperature of the year as a whole was only a little below the average of the last two decades, though we had extreme cold in January, and more cold than usual in October. The only real summer last year was in the last three weeks of August. In fact, there has not been a good summer, and therefore a really good harvest, since 1870.

fore the fire. They must be toasted, first on one side and then on the other, to dry them.

SCOTCH MARMALADE.—To every pound of Seville oranges put one lemon and two quarts of water, and boil them for two hours; then change the water and boil them until quite soft; cut them in half, take out the pulp carefully, and remove the seeds; cut the peel into very thin slices, and return it to the pulp. To every pound of fruit allow two pounds sugar; put a pint of the water the oranges were first boiled in to the sugar, mix the whole together, and boil twenty minutes, or until the marmalade is clear.

THE CONFESSION.

You came by the ford
That day
To drink from the gourd
That lay on the stone at the spring,
And along with the birds my heart took
wing.
As you did come by the way,
And the flush that glows
On the cheek of the rose
When the amorous sun is near,
So red,
On mine with the lily above,
When scarce you thought I'd hear,
"Tis as sweet as a draught of love,"
You said.

The bloom of the peach
Was mine;
My blood was the rich
Red wine of an exquisite pain
Love with his dimpled hand awoke
Had crushed from a maiden's heart,
And my soul it laughed
In the crystal draught
You took from my hand unawares,
And glad
It leaped as when lovers meet
After the lapse of years,
For, "I never have known so
sweet,"
You said.

I was but a girl
Till then,
My brain was a whirl
Of vain desires and vague unrest,
But the wheel of the Fates at Love's
behest
Spun round with a sudden twist,
And the maid at morn,
Ere noon, was born
To the kingdom of womanhood,
And blest
And fretted by love's delay,
I sigh as Sappho would
"Oh, day of days! oh, wedding
day!"
Makehaste." E. S. H.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

CHICKEN SALAD.—Boil a chicken; do not chop very fine, cut up one bunch of celery in small pieces. To make the dressing smooth the yolk of a hard-boiled egg, one full teaspoonful of salt, one or two tablespoonfuls of made mustard, stir in slowly four tablespoonfuls of sweet oil, then two tablespoonfuls of vinegar; pour over the chicken and celery.

OATMEAL CAKES.—Put one pound oatmeal into a bowl, take one pint of boiling water, with one-half ounce salt, butter or lard, melted in, to make the cakes crisp; pour this boiling over the meal, stirring it as quickly as possible into a dough; turn it out upon a baking-board, roll it until it is as thin as it can be to hold together; stamp it into small, round cakes; place them on a girdle, to make them crisp, and afterward be-

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE MORMONS OF UTAH.—The Mormons of Utah have lit their streets with electricity, besides erecting powerful lamps on the mode of the Town Hall.

Four hundred torpedoes have been sunk in the Dardanelles by the Porte, and 2,000 more are kept ready for use.

In the year 1881 there will be four eclipses, two of the sun and two of the moon; also a transit of Mercury across the sun's disc.

The United States Senate have appointed a committee to prepare legislation in reference to cattle disease, which is spreading seriously in the Union.

It is said that elephants swim better than any other land animal. In India they have been known to travel in the water for six hours without touching the bottom.

AMONG the Garos, a Hindoo tribe, when a wife is dissatisfied with her husband, she can legally pack up, leave him, and marry another, after announcing her separation publicly!

In 1813 Pocahontas, the historic Indian maiden, was purchased by Captain Angell from her tribe for a copper kettle! She was afterwards married to John Rolfe, an English planter.

UP to the latter half of the last century we had not reached to the excellence of the locks that were used in Egypt and China thousands of years ago, and we now cannot be said to have surpassed them.

MARY BARNETT.—has just died at Gravesend. She was over 102 years of age, and until within two days of her death had perfect possession of her mental faculties. She had, however, been confined to bed for two years.

THE latest novelty in New York is a dress-album. A piece of every new dress is carefully cut and gummed on one side of a leaf, and the date attached. Thus the book forms a complete history of a lady's dress from season to season.

It appears from tests recently made in Paris that good illuminating gas can be distilled from cork waste. Old bottle corks and fragments of the bark of the cork oak were used in the experiments, for which a special form of retort was required.

News has been received in Vienna from Cairo that two pyramids, built by a king of the Sixth Dynasty, have been discovered to the north of Memphis. They were buried beneath the sand. The vaults and chambers are, it is stated, covered with inscriptions.

ALNWICK CASTLE.—The seat of the Duke of Northumberland, has been recently illuminated by electric lamps, on Mr. Swan's system. The library, a large and lofty apartment, is lighted by three lamps, each containing three of Swan's incandescent carbon lights, and the effect is reported as superior to anything that gas jets or candles ever produced.

INDISCREET persons who have concealed woeful secrets in the agony columns of the "Times" should tremble. Messrs. Chatto and Windus are about to cry those secrets on the house-tops. A lady who has studied the column for the first seventy years of the century and has found a key to most of the cyphers, has written out her discoveries in full, and they will be published shortly under the title of "The Agony Column from 1800 to 1870." It is surprising that this thing has not been done before.

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NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

OUR CORRESPONDENTS should in all cases furnish us with their names and addresses. Letters signed simply with initials or a nom de plume may not always receive immediate attention, as our space is limited. No charge is made under any circumstances for advertisements appearing on this page.

RHOMA.—You can procure Lamplough's Pyretic Saline in any apothecary. As you are about to travel you would do well to procure a supply from your chemist. Of course you can obtain it en route, but at possibly high prices. As it is a compound of potash and soda salts you may depend you can have no better travelling companion. A traveller says, "I would not go a voyage without it."

H. E.—The reason is that in old age the pupil of the eye becomes flat, and the rays of light are consequently not refracted sufficiently in passing through it to meet on the retina and produce distinct vision. The defect is remedied by a convex lens which produces a slight convergence of the rays before they enter the eye.

L. B.—The Dahlia is of Mexican origin, and is named after Dahl, a Swedish botanist, who introduced its cultivation into Europe.

G. T.—Vinegar, when taken with food in moderate quantities, assists digestion. It is especially useful when taken with raw vegetable food, such as salads and similar articles of diet. It is also of great use in aiding the digestion of those kinds of food, such as salmon, which contain large quantities of rich and oily principles.

M. G.—The term gipsy is a corruption of the word Egyptian, that being the name given to that curious race of people, because it was formerly believed that they came originally from Egypt. It is now, however, no longer disputed that they came from India at the time of the great Mohammedan invasion of Dimour Beg, and have belonged to one of the lowest Indian castes, which still resembles them in their appearance and habits.

A. F.—The following is among the many recipes for removing corns: Take a camel's hair brush, moistened with aromatic vinegar, and touch the heart of your corn with it, but take care not to drop it on your toe, for it will burn the skin and cause inflammation. Apply this every night, and in about a week the corns will have disappeared, and without inflicting pain.

C. C.—The Westphalia mode of curing hams is said to be this: For six hams, take four ounces of saltpetre, four ounces of brown sugar, two pints of Liverpool salt, one pint of ground alum, two drams of sal ammonica, and two drams of juniper berries. Mix these ingredients and rub them upon the hams, which, after being allowed to stand for four weeks, should be moderately smoked.

A. L.—There is nothing better for a sick headache than the following recipe: Magnesia, fifteen grains; solution of potassa, fifteen drops; compound tincture of senna, six drams; syrup of ginger, one dram; compound infusion of orange peel, half an ounce. Mix. Take at a draught as an aperient.

C. H. W.—To waterproof muslin, canvas, etc., three baths are prepared as follows: The first, by dissolving one part of sulphate of alumina (concentrated alum cake) in ten parts of cold water. For the second, boil one part of light resin, one part of soda crystals, and ten parts of water, until the soda is dissolved; add one-third part of common salt, to separate the water and collect the soap; dissolve this soap with an equal amount of good palm-oil soap in thirty parts of water. This soap bath must be used hot. The third bath consists of water only. Soak the fabric thoroughly in the first, or alum bath; next pass it through the soap bath, and, lastly, rinse in the water.

IMPOSED UPON.—You voluntarily waived your right to the full month's notice, so it appears to us that you can have no legal claim for a full month's wages.

L. T.—1. Consult a firm of music publishers. Not being a musician of course you could not set the words yourself or properly adapt the tune you associate with them. To publish the song yourself you would have to pay the composer, printer, cost of advertising freely, etc. In either case you must not expect to reap a profit worth speaking of. 2. We have a sufficiently large stock of poetry gratuitously supplied for our journal.

MARYTELL and OLIVE, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men with a view to matrimony. Marytell is eighteen, tall, dark, hazel eyes, good-looking. Olive is seventeen, tall, dark, blue eyes, good-looking.

J. S. and G. P., two friends, would like to correspond with two young ladies with a view to matrimony. J. S. is twenty-three, medium height, dark, fond of home. G. P. is twenty-one, medium height. Respondents must be between eighteen and twenty-three, good-looking, of a loving disposition.

KATHLEEN, nineteen, medium height, dark hair, blue eyes, would like to correspond with a young gentleman about twenty, tall, good-looking.

MISTLETOE, twenty-one, medium height, good-looking, would like to correspond with a young man.

DAISY DEAN and BILLY PLUM, two officers in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with two young ladies with a view to matrimony. Daisy Dean is tall. Billy Plum is medium height, fond of home and dancing.

BONNIE JOCKEY, BILL TRUELOVE and SAMUEL TRUELOVE, three friends in the Royal Marines, would like to correspond with three young ladies with a view to matrimony. Bonnie Jockey is twenty-four, fair hair, blue eyes, fond of music and singing. Bill Truelove is twenty-three, brown hair, hazel eyes. Samuel Truelove is twenty-two, fair, hazel eyes, fond of children.

MINNIE, seventeen, tall, fair, good-looking, fond of music and dancing, would like to correspond with a young man about twenty, tall, dark, good-looking, fond of dancing.

HOLLY and IVY, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen about twenty. Holly is nineteen, dark. Ivy is seventeen, medium height, dark.

WHAT THE WIND SAID.

THE voice of the wind was soft and low,
And this to my ear it seemed to say:
"Oh, come with me where the wild flowers grow,
Over the hills and far away!"

"I know the path to the shadowy dell,
Where the violet opens her soft, blue eyes—
I know where the buds of the cowslip swell,
And the dainty cups of the crocus rise.

"I haste where my darling, the wind flower frail,
Is shyly awaiting my fond embrace—
I ruffle the pools in the sunny vale,
Which mirror the fair narcissus' face.

"I go where the tinkling waters flow—
I find the ferns in each hidden nook—
I know where the silver leaf bends low
To trail its fingers along the brook.

"The snowdrop gleams from the springing grass—
The iris lures me with gentle wiles—
The daisy nods as I lightly pass,
And the heartsease lifts her face and smiles."

And ever seemed the refrain to be,
As I hearkened the voice of the Spring wind
"Oh, hasten! oh, hasten! and come with me,
Over the hills and far away!" E. B. P.

LILLIE T., nineteen, tall, fair, blue eyes, would like to correspond with a tall, dark young gentleman.

DEMOTRENTE, twenty-six, tall, brown hair, blue eyes, would like to correspond with a young lady between seventeen and twenty-two.

LIZZIE, an orphan, fair, brown hair, blue eyes, would like to correspond with a young man about twenty-three.

JOHN C. M., twenty-two, dark hair and eyes, would like to correspond with a young lady with a view to matrimony.

CORAL, twenty, medium height, dark, fond of music and dancing, would like to correspond with a young gentleman.

BLODWEN MENAI and LOERWEN MENAI, two cousins, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Blodwen Menai is twenty, tall, dark hair, hazel eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of music and dancing. Loerwen Menai is nineteen, medium height, fair, grey eyes, fond of music and dancing.

LIVELY GERTY, eighteen, medium height, fair, brown hair, blue eyes, fond of home and children, would like to correspond with a seaman in the Royal Navy about twenty.

E. J. O., nineteen, would like to correspond with a young lady with a view to matrimony.

VINA and MINETTE, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men with a view to matrimony. Respondents must be between twenty-four and twenty-six, tall, dark.

F. D. and W. B., two friends, would like to correspond with two young ladies. F. D. is tall, dark, good-looking, fond of music and singing. W. B. is medium height, fair, blue eyes.

S. S., thirty-five, tall, good-looking, would like to correspond with a young lady about thirty with a view to matrimony.

HEART YARN is twenty-four, tall, light hair, brown eyes, good-looking, fond of home, would like to correspond with a young lady between eighteen and twenty-two.

BONNIE ELSTIE, twenty-four, tall, good-looking, would like to correspond with a young gentleman about twenty-eight.

DICK DEADTE, BUMPING JACK and HARRY BLUFF, three seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with three young ladies. Dick Deadte is twenty-three, medium height, fair, blue eyes. Bumping Jack is twenty, tall, dark hair and eyes, of a loving disposition. Harry Bluff is twenty, tall, fair hair, blue eyes, of a loving disposition.

STARBOARD SHUTE, PLUMPER, GROUND SWELL, and HEAVY SWELL, four seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with four young ladies. Starboard Shute is nineteen, medium height, dark hair and eyes. Plumper is twenty, light hair, blue eyes, good-looking. Ground Swell is nineteen, tall, good-looking, brown hair and eyes. Heavy Swell is twenty-one, medium height, dark hair and eyes.

BLUEBELL, HYACINTH and DAISY, three friends, would like to correspond with three young gentlemen. Bluebell is seventeen, medium height, fair, light hair, blue eyes, fond of home and dancing. Hyacinth is twenty-two, medium height, fair, light hair, grey eyes, fond of home and children. Daisy is seventeen, tall, dark, brown hair and eyes, fond of home and children.

FANCY THAT and I AM SURPRISED, two friends, would like to correspond with two young ladies with a view to matrimony. Fancy That is twenty-four, tall, dark hair, brown eyes, fond of home and children. I Am Surprised is twenty-one, medium height, fair, light hair, brown eyes, fond of home and music. Respondents must be about the same age.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED:

BACHELOR is responded to by—A. M.

SAUCY HARRY by—Rose, medium height, good-looking, fond of home and children.

LOVING TOM by—Saucy Poll, eighteen, fair, good-looking, fond of home and children.

DARLING DICK by—Blossom, twenty, tall, dark, good-looking, fond of home and music.

CIS by—Leonard, twenty-four, tall, dark, blue eyes, fond of home.

BACHELOR by—Miss G., thirty-three, dark, fond of music.

CHARLES by—Lena.

EDWARD by—Fanny.

CLARA by—J. D., twenty, medium height, dark, good-looking.

ALICE by—Happy Fred, twenty-two, medium height, of a loving disposition.

AMY by—Naval Telegraph, twenty-one, tall, dark, fond of home.

BACHELOR by—Dollie, twenty-seven, good-looking.

FREDERICK ST. L. by—Myra, medium height, fair, fond of children.

MABEL W. by—James B.

VIOLET by—Dashing Jack.

A. W. by—E. M., medium height, dark hair and eyes.

A. H. by—R. M., tall, fair, brown hair, blue eyes.

MISTLETOE by—Ivy, twenty, dark, good-looking.

W. B. M. by—Sophia, forty-three.

EVA by—Jeremy D., tall, dark.

CLARA by—Samuel P., tall, dark, of a loving disposition.

THEIRD AND TRUE by—Kate N., nineteen, tall, good-looking, fond of home.

CIS by—Rob Roy, eighteen, good-looking, of a loving disposition.

EDWARD by—Nellie, seventeen, medium height, dark, of a loving disposition.

CIS by—A. F., medium height, of a loving disposition.

W. H. by—Ethel M., eighteen, medium height, of a loving disposition, fond of home.

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NOTICE.—Part 219 (January) Now Ready, Price Sixpence; post free, Eightpence.

N.B.—Correspondents must address their Letters to the Editor of the LONDON READER, 334, Strand, W.C.

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